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“Does a Rose Speak When Spoken To?”: Rococo Aesthetics and Visual Resistance in Jacques
Demy’s *Lady Oscar*

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By

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Advisor: Ryan Cook, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

“Does a Rose Speak When Spoken To?”: Rococo Aesthetics and Visual Resistance in Jacques Demy’s *Lady Oscar*

By Sharona Bollinger

This project will consider Jacques Demy’s scarcely studied 1979 film *Lady Oscar*, a period drama set in the French court of Versailles about a cross-dressing noblewoman, as an expression of cinematic Rococo aesthetics. Based on Ikeda Riyoko’s *The Rose of Versailles* manga from the early 1970s, Demy’s film offers a transhistorical and transnational exercise of Rococo visuals and ethos. With reference to the subversive qualities of the Rococo, which forward visual spectacles of feminine fantasy and self-expression to challenge restricting and patriarchal structures, this paper is a pointed consideration of the similarities and differences of Rococo aesthetics in the historical court of Versailles, Demy’s film oeuvre and Japanese *shōjo* culture, culminating in *Lady Oscar* speaking to an experience of marginalized groups including the young, the feminine, and the queer.

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"Does a Rose Speak When Spoken To?": Rococo Aesthetics and Visual Resistance in Jacques Demy's *Lady Oscar*

"I wish to reconsider the river. I'm not sure it has become meaningful enough by meandering as purposelessly as it should."

- Marie Antoinette in *Lady Oscar*

"The Rococo began as a set of reversals."

- William Park, *The Idea of Rococo*

Introduction

Ten years ago, on the now defunct website *Midnight Eye: Visions of Japanese Cinema*, Jasper Sharp offered his opinion on the French film *Lady Oscar* from 1979: "whilst the film may represent a particular black spot in the late career of its director, it is one of those works that is so compellingly awful that entire dissertations could be written about what exactly went wrong." The little written about, and even less liked, film, directed by Jacques Demy was adapted from a Japanese manga from the early 1970s, *The Rose of Versailles* (*Berusaiyu no bara*) by Ikeda Riyoko, and has long disappointed both fans of Demy and Ikeda. Yet the film, when met on its own terms, provides a fascinating and challenging display of visuals, gender relations, class politics, and French history.

The film follows the androgynous protagonist Oscar François de Jarjayes, the youngest daughter of the Commander of the Royal Guards, who raises her as his heir and son due to the absence of a biological male son. Raised as a boy and trained in the masculine arts of dueling, fencing, hunting, and military command, Oscar navigates her

world dressed and treated as a man. Placed in the court of Versailles as the personal guard to the dauphine and then the Queen of France, the young Marie Antoinette, Oscar negotiates the growing antagonistic politics between classes that will eventually explode into the French Revolution.

Under tight production demands and asked to translate a rather culturally-specific foreign text, Demy used this commission to generate his own visions of "Frenchness," androgyny, history, and politics. When put in context and dialogue both with Demy's other films and the origins of Japanese *shōjo* ("young girl") culture, the film reveals complicated politics of aesthetics, self-expression, and identity. *Lady Oscar* can best be conceptualized as utilizing cinematic Rococo aesthetics, a mode of visuals originating in the eighteenth century but reemerging in a number of films and other media within the last fifty years. A style that celebrates and exploits the excessively feminine, expressive, the ephemeral, artificial, subjective, and performative, the Rococo places this film in a long history of feminine and often queer expression and desire to challenge and subvert pre-existing and oppressive structure.

The Rococo was a period of Western art roughly spanning the eighteenth century, developed first in France and then spread throughout Europe.[1] Also known as the Late Baroque style, the Rococo was a development of the lavish, exaggerated, and forceful forms of the classical Baroque into a more feminine sensibility and a greater embellishment of subjective and personal expression. It is a decorative style that turned the powerful Baroque forms into light, playful and gracefully sinuous lines, emphasizing

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[1] Davis, *Rococo*, 3-4. Fiske Kimball in his 1943 book *The Creation of the Rococo* cites a 1699 engraving by Pierre Lepature as the first piece from which Rococo style came into being.

the ornate, the asymmetrical, eschewing dark dramatic shadows and bold colors for a pastel color scheme.[2] A court style of the privileged and wealthy, best exemplified by the court of Versailles in France, the Rococo was an escape from affluent boredom. Symptomatic of a broader reaction against the pomp and restraints of the court, against the strict rationalism of the Enlightenment and the era of Absolutism, Rococo celebrated the emotional, irrational, playful and purely decorative.[3]

A quintessential painting of the Rococo period, specifically the French Rococo, is Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* (*Les hazards heureux de l'escarpolette*) from 1767-1768. Along with Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) and François Boucher (1703-1770), Fragonard (1732-1806) was a leading painter of the Rococo period. *The Swing* features a feminine subject, a court lady stylishly dressed and in a state of play. In a fecund forested area of a garden, surrounded by lush, cloudy trees and serpentine branches, she is watched by two men, in addition to a statue of Cupid and two putti. One man resides in the shadows and holds the guiding ropes of her swing as she soars into the center of the frame. Her delicate pink figure slyly lifts one leg, her slipper caught in mid-air, arching over the reclining figure of the second man, hidden in the shrubbery, catching a glance up her petticoats. The curvy, asymmetrical forms, the playfulness of the swing, and the sexual joke of forbidden dalliance all converge within this Rococo expression of fantasy and delight. The soft haze of leaves and pastels further the dreaminess and sweetness of the image, the diffuse light that gently highlights the surface quality of

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[2] Park, *The Idea of Rococo*, 17.

[3] See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth Century Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

The Swing, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 1767, The Wallace Collection, London

subject and canvas. The painting presents a fantasy of play, leisure, and sexual freedom, an excessive femininity externalized onto the canvas.

Born from a desire for a freer and more expressive life, Rococo represented this wish, this fantasy of the most wealthy and most restricted, in images of nature, idealized peasantry, sexual promiscuity, shocking and momentary temporality, and the playful fusion of the ordinary and the mythic. It is a style that relied upon exaggerated and recognized artifice and performance, the active constructions of dreams and material desires. This yearning for a freer life was particularly resonant with court women, and is

historically associated with their networks of community and consumerism. Sexual freedom and fulfillment, fashion, make-up, material patronage, empowered consumption, youth, and beauty were all fantasies played out in this style, in opposition to the patriarchal structure they lived within.[4]

The Rococo as a period style ended with the French Revolution and the concurrent development of the hyper-masculine and strictly ordered and structured Neo-Classicism, and has since been remembered for its excessive frivolity. Long marred by the acerbic commentary of Denis Diderot, Rococo was recovered with the Baroque style by the 1880s through the work of Heinrich Wölfflin and by the early 20th Century was determined as its own period.[5] Now widely accepted as a subversive style, in its insistence on expressivity, feminine subjectivity, and identity construction, the Rococo has been further investigated as a concept that lives on beyond the eighteenth century.[6] As Melissa Hyde writes in the Afterword to an anthology on this revivalism, *Rococo Echo: Art, History and Historiography from Cochin to Coppola,* the constants of Rococo through time and place have been "…the insistent association of the Rococo with femininity and women, with non-normative masculinity, with dreams, and the ways in which it is often deployed as a vehicle for resistance of one kind of another."[7]

Within the *Rococo Echo* anthology there are two notable mentions of Rococo reemergence in film: one is a chapter written by Rebecca Arnold titled "The New

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[4] Park, *The Idea of Rococo*, 19.

[5] Ibid, 16.

[6] Park, *The Idea of the Rococo,* 13, and Hyde, "Afterword," 338.

[7] Hyde, "Afterword," 338.

Rococo: Sofia Coppola and Fashions in Contemporary Femininity," the other a case study in Hyde's afterword of Nakashima Tetsuya's *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma monogatari*) from 2004. Arnold argues for the presence of Rococo aesthetics in Coppola's first three films, particularly the 2006 historical film *Marie Antoinette*.[8] Coppola's films present Rococo aesthetics and ethos through an emphasis on female community, nostalgia, subjectivity, anachronistic features, pastel color schemes, and schema. Arnold claims that the use of fashion, fantasy fused with history and narratives of identity construction establish parallels between the experience of Marie Antoinette with a modern experience of girlhood, and, particularly, with Coppola's own celebrity childhood. She also notes the visual pleasures that Rococo aesthetics achieve through the medium of film. The use of expressive costume, color, light, rhythmic editing, and subjective narratives that delight in anachronism and pastiche amplify Rococo's preexisting emphasis on visual excess. Discussion of the cinematic Rococo also appears in a 2010 article by Anne McKnight titled "Frenchness and Transformation of Japanese Subculture, 1972-2004." McKnight, using the Rococo aesthetics found within Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles* and Nakashima's *Kamikaze Girls,* develops two theories of subculture in consumerist Japan in the 1970s and in the 2000s.

Within a broader discourse of the decorative image, Rococo aesthetics fit into Rosalind Galt's intervention in aesthetic film theory. In her book *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image,* by interrogating the fate and reception of the "pretty" film, Galt brings attention to the historical and philosophical politics underlying hierarchies of aesthetic

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[8] Arnold also attempts to, unconvincingly, apply Rococo aesthetics to Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation.*

privileging realism over the decorative. Films of visual spectacle and "prettiness" have long been disassociated with politics, truth, or greater meaning. Having inherited the historically perpetuated fear of the ornate image, as associated with the cloying and the false, the feminine and Asiatic/Oriental, film theory and reception has dismissed many films for "just" being "pretty." Rooting her larger discussion in historical transitions and legacies from the Rococo to the Neoclassical, Galt offers a model that supports an aesthetic theory that explains the hostility towards Rococo aesthetics as well as provides other examples of politics expressed through the hyper-visible feminine.

This article, drawing on and expanding this small but established work on the cinematic Rococo, posits Demy's *Lady Oscar* as another film that has appropriated and revived Rococo aesthetics. Indeed, *Lady Oscar* works as a particularly exemplary text of Neo-Rococo aesthetics through its nature as both a Demy film and an adaptation of a Japanese *shōjo* narrative. Both Demy's distinctive style and *shōjo* conventions reiterate Rococo strategies of feminine expression, empowerment, consumerism, and excess. A study of Rococo aesthetics also considers this film's complicated sense of visual history, probing how these images furnish truth, memory, nostalgia, and historical narratives. With reference to films like Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) and *Kamikaze Girls*, this article will focus on the convergence of Demy's Rococo-like expressivity of style, *shōjo'*s transgressive narratives of androgyny and class conflict, and the feminine networks of consumerism and community expressed through fashion, within this film. Spanning time and nationality, conflating multiple histories and contexts, Neo-Rococo aesthetics give a particular voice to marginalized groups including the young, the

feminine, and the queer. While Sharp claims entire dissertations could be dedicated to the failures of this film, I have found it a much more productive exercise to explore *Lady Oscar'*s enduring and complex statements of visual expression, history, and the power of fantasy.

Demy's Rococo

While not all couched in an eighteenth-century setting or resplendent with painting conventions of the Rococo period, Demy's broader style aligns with Rococo aesthetics adapted to a different century and a different France. If Rococo was originally meant to invoke youth, self-expression, fantasy, identity construction, and freedom with a flair for the feminine, excessive and playful, Demy fits into the category with his films from the 1960s through the 1980s. His commitment to lyricism, color, the fantastical, and his underlying queer and gender politics express a modern revival of Rococo. Demy's other films, before and after *Lady Oscar,* utilize similar and consistent structural and visual strategies to achieve their emotional arcs as well as to complicate the relationships between form and politics.

Demy's aesthetics are distinctive and consistent throughout his films. His oeuvre has often been titled the *Demy-monde* or the "Demy World" as his vision is cohesive enough to shape a discrete and parallel universe. Aiding this remarkable consistency was his tendency to work with the same production people throughout his career: most notably the extravagant composer Michel Legrand, the production designer Bernard Evein, and the iconic French actress Catherine Deneuve. Actors, and even characters,

Stages of love expressed in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* from the pink blush of young love to the bright red of a one night stand to the uncertain orange of a second love. Demy anticipates a similar use of floral wallpaper encompassing a distraught feminine figure that Coppola uses in *Marie Antoinette*. Both Deneuve and Dunst are subsumed to costume and domestic space, expressing moments of lost autonomy to demanding mothers.

reappear from film to film, connecting each narrative to a larger world.[9] His simultaneously mythical and ordinary France is distinguishable through his stylistic signature of pervasive and eye-popping color. Famously, Demy painted building facades in towns like Cherbourg and Rochefort during production, the result being immersive, striking, and immediately identifiable. The colors are often used as external expressions of character's interior emotions projected onto the setting, surrounding both characters and audiences with intimate subjectivity.

The color combined with romantic, melodramatic, and impressionistic structures contributes to a visual and sensual excess, pushing his films outside the realm of realism and into a state of potent expressivity. The visual splendor of his films is often contrasted against the relatively small scale and provincial scope of family and romantic drama

[9] The two most direct examples of recurring characters are Roland Cassard (Marc Michel) from *Lola* and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and Jackie (Jeanne Moreau) from *Bay of Angels* and *Model Shop.* Guy (Nino Castelnuovo) from *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* was also intended to reappear in *The Young Girls of Rochefort*. Jacques Perrin and Catherine Deneuve as a couple fall in love twice, once in *The Young Girls of Rochefort* and again in *Donkey Skin.*

driving the narratives. Demy was a master of "rupturing the extraordinary with the banal [to] render it absurd."[10] Demy largely wrote narratives about broken families in the lower and middles class. Their lives ordinary, but touched with the fantastical: tragic romance, destiny, scientific impossibility, but always with steadfast roots in French history and social concerns.

As Ginette Vincendeau has noted: "It is a filmic universe in which melancholy, tragedy, and a hint of hostile social relations are balanced by a fairy-tale atmosphere of poetry, music, and cinephilia."[11] His work has been described as *étrange* (strange) or alternatively as *enchanté*/*enchanteur* (enchanted/enchanting, also in reference to and playing off of the musical/sung nature of his films, since "to sing" translates to *chanter*) and as a *monde enchanté* (enchanted world), due to the otherworldliness of his colorful sets as well as his melodramatic and fairytale modes of narrative logic and flow. As much as Demy's films are about the magic of cinema, emotion and desire, they are also politically-invested films. Engaged with contemporaneous French issues from the Algerian War and censorship (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg/Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* [1964]) to advancement of the Women's Liberation Movement and abortion rights (*A Slightly Pregnant Man/L'Événement le plus important depuis que l'homme a marché sur la Lune* [1973]) to a history of industrial labor strikes and police violence (*Une Chambre en ville* [1982]), Demy's films incorporate complex visual and narrative retellings of French history, but always within his signature fanciful milieu.

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[10] Waldron, *Jacques Demy*, 69.

[11] Vincendeau, "Demy's Paradise Found," 15.

Demy's later tendency toward outright fairytale films (*Donkey Skin/Peau d'Âne* [1970], *The Pied Piper* [1972]) and celebrity phenomena (*La Naissance du Jour* [1980], *Parking* [1985], *Trois places pour le 26* [1988]) aligned with his politics concerning gender roles and power dynamics; familial structures and taboos; his sustained criticism of a hypocritical and intemperate upper class; and an interest in the formation of a postwar consumerist culture. The strikingly consistent visual and aesthetic execution of his films and his sustained study of subversive themes and politics display an ability to present a surface of excess and frivolity tempered with darker undertones of consequences and contexts that hint at a troubled reflection of the world. But how does Demy's unique form shape and inform his politics? And vice versa? Where do these strategies intersect with Rococo aesthetics?

Demy's films are notable for their playful and subversive approach to genre. Most famous for his musicals, Demy not only celebrates the spectacle, grandeur, and lyricism of musical expression, he takes these norms to their extreme conclusions. Bookending most of Demy's career are his two feature-length musical masterpieces: *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and *Une Chambre en ville,* constructed with only sung dialogue. This unusual approach to the musical, a committed appropriation of the operatic mode, has a distancing effect: placing the characters and story in an alternate provincial France where expression through song is the default that immerses the audience in an emotionally charged, fantastical place. When asked in a 1987 interview why he chose to craft the unusual sung-through musical, Demy explained it as the most *believable* way to convey emotion:

> Lyricism. If you sing the lines instead of speaking them, it gives them greater power, because music always has greater emotional power and for the stories I want to tell…For example, I could never have filmed *Une Chambre en ville* if it wasn't sung, meaning like a regular dramatic film. Impossible. No one would believe it. It would be ridiculous. The fact the dialogue is sung makes everything possible and believable.[12]

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg follows a young couple in love as the realities of the Algerian War and societal pressures break up their fragile relationship while *Une Chambre en ville,* one of the few true and straightforward tragedies among Demy's films, explores the violence and emotions surrounding a young, impetuous couple during the 1955 Nantes labor strikes. It is only through the acutely unnatural that these strong emotions, the melancholy and tragedy of ordinary life, can be communicated. This commitment to emotional resonance also firmly fits within a melodramatic mode Demy utilizes throughout his work. Imbued with character subjectivity, personal drama, and excessive emotion to move an audience, the narratives blend the momentum of musical and melodramatic expectations to reinforce the spectacle of emotion painted across the screen itself.

What makes the sung dialogue of a musical so real for Demy is, paradoxically, its blatant artifice, truth that is found in excess. As Jim Ridley eloquently points out in a short essay on *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*: "Is there a genre that demands a greater leap of imagination from a viewer, a more sophisticated acceptance of blatant artifice, than the

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[12] Demy, "Q&A with Demy from the 1987 Midnight Sun Film Festival."

movie musical?…This is not the real world; this is a world with the veil of realism parted, allowing the passions beneath to peek through."[13] The artificial, the constructed, the performed all allow Demy to express the unspeakable, to visually and conceptually capture the abstract: emotions, passions, dreams, and desires. Embracing artifice allows Demy to simultaneously convey the intimacy of individual interior realities while refracting these impressions externally. Yet no matter how close we are brought to the emotions of a Demy melodrama, we are also held at bay by his intense and coded formalism. These strange juxtapositions between artifice and reality, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the objective with the subjective are integral to the artful playfulness of the Rococo aesthetic.

Demy's more traditional renditions of the musical structure, like *The Young Girls of Rochefort* and *Trois places pour le 26*, also strongly accentuate the strange-ness of exaggerated expression with joyful performance. Yet simultaneously, even these exuberant films are underlaid with strands of complex and troubling presences, treated by the characters as just part of life. *The Young Girls of Rochefort* features a peculiar subplot —unraveling in the background of the spotlighted romances—of a serial killer wandering the streets, brutally killing women. The characters note these unfolding events, in the newspapers and in masses that crowd the crime scenes, yet they treat these occurrences with the same cavalier singing as anything else happening in the town: an upcoming carnival, plans of moving or vacation, romantic longing, etc. *Trois places pour le 26* has a similar ambivalent attitude to a realization of father-daughter incest that passes by mostly

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[13] Ridley, "A Finite Forever," 25.

unremarked upon to make way for a happy ending. The ebullient colors and costumes combined with musical performance, at first impression, signal a festive tone for a spectacle genre, yet this atmosphere is constantly subverted and complicated by tragedy, murder, and societal/familial politics. His movies are thus tinged with an unnerving dualism: of surface spectacle underlaid with harsher or more complicated realities of the world. Yet the undertones running through Demy's oeuvre are important elements of his "light touch" approach, allowing him to explore the tensions created between the surface narrative and visuals with an underlying depth of historical reference, contradictions, and personal politics.[14]

A quotidian but ornate and fantastical portrait of life, mired in complicated historical contexts that hint at a bleak and occasionally fatalistic tone, is characteristic of Rococo, an aesthetic that utilizes a light touch to allude to a range of greater issues at stake: regulated expression, disparate power dynamics, and a period's sense of purpose and history in the age of Enlightenment. As a movement particularly associated with the feminine and the queer, Rococo works in opposition to patriarchal societies that either heavily regulated or disallowed such experiences and existence. The Rococo is also, closely and enduringly, tied to the French Revolution, through proximity in history and through a narrative of class politics. While a court style invested in escapism, Rococo is forever tinged with the retrospective knowledge of the Revolution, when a wealthy and bored upper class was violently confronted with the realities of a starving and angry lower class. The frolicking, eccentric, and expensively decorative style is forever

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[14] Demy claimed that he "preferred light films that spoke of grave matters rather than the other way around." Quandt, "*Jacques Demy, A to Z.*"

associated with an inevitable and impending downfall.[15] As in Demy's world, the troubled relationship between perceived historical reality and politics of artistic representation explode into visual excess, complex ambivalence, and multiple narratives.

Demy's interest in actual fairytales and fairytale modes of narrative also served as a site to subvert expectations and play with form, highlighting fantastical and surreal qualities. Demy traces his passion for fairytales to his childhood of puppet shows. Particularly taken with Charles Perrault's variation of Cinderella, "Donkey Skin," he describes his own adaptation burgeoning from a desire to share this memory: "I wanted to make people dream like I had dreamed as a child."[16] Connecting this very personal goal with a broader desire to tell stories through film, Demy designates storytelling as an act that connects generations over time, place, and context. He also links this desire to dreaming and childhood, imbuing it with a wish to share spaces of possibility, escape, and imagination of youth and play with his audience.

Rococo often collapsed the boundaries between myth and history, fantasy and reality. Classical myths were popular subjects, with lavish Olympians and the pantheon of tragic lovers placed in lush settings and ahistorical dress. Paintings like Watteau's pair *The Embarkation to Cythera/Pilgrmage to Cythera* (1717-19) located contemporaneous figures and people in the same space as the ancient, mythical island. The setting within

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[15] A sense of this historical tension is also present in Demy's films, which have occasionally experienced a phenomenon of being retrospectively informed by later events. The best examples lay within *The Young Girls of Rochefort.* While a joyous film, it is also a film associated with variations of violent death: the serial killer wandering the streets in the film as well as the tragic death of Françoise Dorléac (one of the young girls) just after the film was shot. The serial killer proves another strange contingency to the film. One of the most inexplicable side plots in a Demy film is the strange figure of Subtil Dutrouz, notable for his last name which ends in a silent 'z' as opposed to the more common 'x' for Dutroux. Decades after *The Young Girls of Rochefort* premiered in 1967, the name Dutroux was made infamous by the Belgium serial killer and child molester, Marx Dutroux. A recent adaptation of *The Young Girls* into a stage play opted to change the name of Dutrouz, because of the retroactive association. Ibid.

[16] Demy, "Q&A with Demy from the 1987 Midnight Sun Film Festival."

the painting transitions from recognizable and relatively realistic activities and colors, more naturalistic and saturated, to the hazy pastels of cherubs, cotton-candy clouds and foamy waters. Myth and classicism are invoked playfully emphasize a painting's narrative, usually a statue of Cupid and/or Venus overlooking a risqué romantic encounter. Artificial relics were often embedded in the landscape to create a nostalgia for the past, specifically a past of perceived extravagance, freedom, promiscuity, and beauty. Rococo was fantasy expressed through visual discrepancy. Even much of the elaborate clothing of the period was further embellished in portraits, impossible costumes brought to existence through pictorial representation. The blending of historical, contemporary, and fantasy within a single scape of Rococo paintings or of a cinematic frame conflates the real with the unreal, history with myth, present with past, to craft a sense of anachronism and artifice. This effect is particularly strong in Coppola's iteration of cinematic Rococo aesthetics in *Marie Antoinette*, which utilizes anachronistic music and costume to invoke particularly feelings and memories rather than historical accuracy.[17] For Demy, the Rococo ethos of fantastical spaces served his desire to create an alternate, queer world that reflected his own reality and time, but as a space wholly unrestrained by social, physical, or generic norms.

While Demy's films resonate with Rococo aesthetics as a whole, *Lady Oscar* presents a focused and amplified example of these tendencies. As his most direct approach to French history, *Lady Oscar* explores the blurry boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, masculinity and femininity, and identity and performance. The film bears

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[17] The costume for Coppola's Marie Antoinette were primarily inspired by fashion photography from the 1970s and 1980s rather than period dress. Arnold, "The New Rococo," 306.

many of his favored themes and structures: a frustrated melodramatic romance, an ironic ending, an indulgent attention to color, and a complicated relationship to politics and history. Oscar herself is a body and a character where Demy's complicated politics converge, marking a turning point in his concerns toward more overt and explicit explorations of earlier implicit themes. Oscar is a disruption: a fictional, fantastical presence in a historical timeline, surrounded by and interacting with actual historical personages. She is also a gendered deviation, a crossdresser who negates the gender binary. It is through the aberration of Oscar that Demy is able to converge his juxtapositions of truth and fantasy, history and fairytale, male and female, romance and conflict, class and gender.

Lady Oscar displays a playful yet complex Neo-Rococo approach to history through an emphasis on artifice and performance, a denial of binary and delineated gender and sexuality, and the distancing created by constructed fairytale and melodramatic modes; a blatantly constructed conceptualization of a "French" past. Ultimately, the film renders the blatant artifice of recreating history through film, collapsing genre, space, and time to complicate the impressions of a gendered experience of the eighteenth century parallel to Demy's own subjective and historical realities. As much as gender is being performed by the characters and actors, the movie itself is performing history. The film demonstrates that focusing on notorious scandals and personages that align with how Versailles is *remembered* is just as powerful a strategy, if not more so, than falsely constructing an "authentic" or "accurate" representation of a

period. Historical fact confronts fluid and subjective impressions of history to produce an expression of subjective experience, both on the part of creator, characters, and viewer.

Set in the court of Versailles and shot on location, with period costume and settings, *Lady Oscar* as a historical period drama makes a complicated bid for visual history. Film is able to bring a sense of immediacy to history, the surface impression that this must be what it looked like and felt like to live in a past moment. But the film is also a complicated and problematic interpretation of history, made up of 1970s materials, technologies, assumptions, concerns, and people. While *Lady Oscar* takes advantage of the Versailles location and its characters are outfitted with costumes to evoke the grandeur and decadence of the time, this film does not claim authenticity but rather interpretation. The visual strategies common to both Demy's film and Rococo paintings intersect in subject matter (feminine aristocracy, consumption, identity construction and performance, fashion, etc.) and execution (ironic tone, fantasy construction, classical and floral motifs, surface play, soft light and colors, etc.). Upholding Demy's expressive color and theatrical excess, the make-up, costume, wealth, and lavishness of the court indulge in a sensuousness of the historical period that translates well onto film. Coppola makes a similar gesture for the mythic qualities of historical memories through pointed scenes of historical construction: namely the first, pre-title sequence of Marie Antoinette luxuriating in wealth, surrounded by copious amounts of cake, and the "Let them eat cake" scene, differentiated from the diegesis of the film through exaggerated make-up and performance.[18]

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[18] Ibid, 307.

Title Card of Jacque Demy's *Lady Oscar*

Demy correspondingly draws attention to this construction of past through formal jokes scattered throughout the film. The opening credits, taking place after the prologue of Oscar's birth, is the first and most obvious. The title and credits, all in a neon purple art-deco font, are overlaid on a typical Rococo image adorning a door: a couple in a garden, the girl on a swing being admired by a young man, a rustic picnic at their feet. The title itself seems to express this contrast between "classical" and "modern": the "Lady" is printed in looping cursive, yet still hooks together as if it were a neon sign (the a-d-y linked through stylized u-curves instead of more conventional cursive intersections), sitting atop "OSCAR" in all capitals and in a blockier script. This early contrast also aligns with Oscar's vacillating gender: the curves and decorative quality of a cursive female title of nobility contrasting with the bolder, masculine name. Both

gendered styles are encompassed within the one title and one singular identity.[19] The contrast of historical image and neon inter-titles continues as each leap in time is brightly announced, a colorful touch at odds with the period background. This visual and temporal play draws attention to the crafting of the film, image, and historical narrative, highlighting themes of artifice and juxtaposition.

The swing, an iconic image of the Rococo period underlining playfulness, youth, and infused with sexual suggestion, reappears later in the film, occupied by Marie Antoinette as she describes her Rococo fantasies. The scene opens on a painted map of an elaborate retreat Antoinette is planning to build, the infamous *Hameau de la Reine.*[20] It is a pastiche of classical architecture, lakes, gardens, windmills, and barns. "It's beautiful. It's exactly as it looks in my mind." She states before the camera pulls back to reveal a sardonically formal picnic set-up in an empty field. "And it's all there. The little thatched hovels, the hay rigs, the dovecots! Even the dung heaps! They won't smell will they?" Reassured that nothing too dirty, offensive, or realistic will infiltrate her retreat, the Queen actively imagines her fantasy, which will be physically realized through her wealth. She discusses the consumptive and constructing process as if it were a creative venture: "And I will prefer that none of the peasants be old. The milkmaids should have rosy cheeks. And the shepherds should be chosen for their broad shoulders." She even inserts herself into this dream, leisurely swinging and dreaming: "I'd like to be strolling

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[19] I would like to thank the professors and colleagues at my Graduate Thesis Colloquium for the ideas that arose out of discussion.

[20] After her ascendence to the throne, Marie Antoinette escaped from the court she found so oppressive, instead living in her own private château on the grounds of Versailles, the Petit Trianon. At great expense and to much criticism, she funded the building of her own village in 1783. Fraser, *Marie Antoinette,* 191.

through the grove, picking berries, and thinking about nothing! And I'd see the hamlet like a life-size puppet show before me, a moving painting! Made of real people doing real things!" Fleeing from her unhappy role in politics and court, Antoinette engineers various escapes from her situation through excessive imagination and consumption.[21] As her retainer exclaims "Whatever you can conceive, we shall create for you", it is made clear that the Queen is a center of expressive, performative, and consumptive power. She is enabled to imagine freely, to control and manipulate the world around her through visual excess, class privilege, and control of fantasy production.

Through this construction of the blatantly artificial, she is in many ways opposing the patriarchal society around her, rejecting responsibilities of position and age to indulge her own desires. Historically, the Queen had relativity little control over the course of her life, but seized what she could through consumption and escape. The active desire and ability to imagine a different space, a different system, becomes a political aspect of the Rococo. This sequence links Antoinette's vision with the fantasies enabled by film. Cinema is a "moving painting," a construction of "real people doing real things," particularly Demy's cinema which delights in shameless, artful fabrication and phantasmagoria. Threading together the excessive Rococo mode of fantasy, with Demy's modus operandi and the disruptive transgression of Oscar and Marie Antoinette within a historical narrative, *Lady Oscar* probes the potential of individual expression within a pointed re-imagining of history.

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[21] Such escapes include the Petit Trianon, escapades in Paris, and her hamlet which, in Demy's film, jokingly included a working volcano before she was convinced to instead build her own theatre.

A Rose by Any Other Name

Commissioned by the Japanese producer Yamamoto Mataichirô in 1978, Demy was given one year to make *Lady Oscar* before it would premier in its primary market: Japan. The film is a French-Japanese co-production, produced by the anime studio Kitty Films, sponsored by the make-up corporation Shiseido and Nippon TV, and distributed by Tōhō.[22] As a live-action adaptation of a very popular Japanese manga comic, Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles*, the film is part of a larger franchise and culture of Japanese consumerism, industry, and girls' media. The publication of *Rose of Versailles* provoked a remarkable movement of fan engagement, a so-called "Beru-boom," that sustained an intense and popular interest in not only the comic and subsequent media, but in any thing remotely "French." The same year that *Lady Oscar* premiered, six years after the comic series ran, *The Rose of Versailles* anime (directed by Nagahama Tadao and Dezaki Osamu) aired on Japanese television, offering a contracted version that foregrounds the comic's most popular and compelling narratives, characters, and visual motifs, specifically restructuring more exclusively around Oscar. As a foundational text of the *shōjo* genre, *The Rose of Versailles manga* not only provided the narrative, characters, and setting for *Lady Oscar*, it also contributed to the Rococo aesthetics in the film. As Demy's personal filmmaking style resonates with the eighteenth-century movement, so do many conventions of the *shōjo* mode, a heavily stylized and visualized expression of "girls' culture" (*shōjo bunka*) that was transitioning to greater political, expressive, and female-oriented production in the 1970s.

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[22] The film would premiere in France in 1980. Purportedly only shown twice, once in April 1980 as part of a *Cahiers du Cinema* event and once at the Angers Festival in 1981. Waldron, *Jacques Demy*, 136.

While the subject and history are French, this particular narrative of the court of Versailles was conceived by a Japanese comic artist. Like a game of Telephone, the narrative filtered its way back to France through Demy's adaptation. This loop of interpretations has left marks on the text, most tangible in the "Frenchness" portrayed in the film. Demy's version of the tale, rooted in his own interests in melodrama, history, and performance, emphasizes the quality of cultural performance beyond the characters and the narrative, transforming the film into a kind of cultural and historical drag.[23] These were unique circumstances that enabled Demy to affectively and pointedly address broad questions of gender and class, and more particularly interrogate political, social, and historical boundaries: the roles of visuals in artistic and social performance, the transhistorical and transnational concern of a historical period, and the revolutionary qualities of overly performed and practiced traditions.

Invested in many of the same themes as Rococo and Demy, such as liminal states, consumerism, fantasy construction, gender play, and feminine subjectivity, *shōjo* embraced and exploited the conflation of a romanticized "European" culture, youth, escapism, and gender performativity to articulate an experience of Japanese girlhood and feminine community that often enacted alternative or queer forms and opposition to existing patriarchal structures. *Shōjo* as a genre is primarily targeted at young girls and women (roughly under the age of 20, unmarried) and perpetuates narratives of growing up, psychological and emotional development, friendship, family, and romance. Part of a larger girls' culture, *shōjo manga* has a long and embedded history from prewar girls'

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[23] I am grateful to Dr. Ryan Cook for suggesting this idea to me.

literature and discourse through the present manifestation often associated with the Japanese comic industry.[24] Targeting a demographic of young women to participate in the literature, media, and communities, through both consumption and creation, *shōjo* serves as a site of feminine discourse, shaped by outside contexts but originating from a sense of inclusion and shared experience.[25]

Comics within the *shōjo* genre are used reflectively and reflexively, working within intertextual modes of reference, across media from light novels, comics, anime, drama CDs, movies, and live-action adaptations, in addition to lucrative franchising of merchandise. The genre is defined by a young protagonist, often (but not always or necessarily) a girl, working through dramatic and emotional experiences while making meaningful connections with people around her. These narratives tend to focus on identity-formation and self-realization as informed by these personal relationships.[26] Formally, the style aligns with larger *manga* characteristics of a flat aesthetic, exaggeratedly large eyes, slim bodies, and, in the comics, textured black and white panels. While *shōjo* currently is largely produced by women for girls, it was not until the early 1970s that women entered the comic market as creators. Prior to this fundamental shift, even the comics aimed at young girls were produced by men in an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry.

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[24] Shamoon, "Revolutionary Romance," 5.

[25] Although this community revolves around Japanese girls, it has had a strong international influence as a culture and mode that resonates beyond national borders (along with the broader trend of anime as a popular Japanese cultural export) and it has also come to encompass more than just young, female fans. This pervasion of the *shōjo* mode has, at times, been notable enough to greatly concern culture critics who worry about the "feminization" or "*shōjo-fication*" of Japan and Japanese society. Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 249.

[26] Jennifer Prough, has termed the subject of *shōjo* manga to be *ningen kankei* or "human relations." *Straight from the Heart*, 2.

Shōjo and Rococo aesthetics share many visual strategies, formal interests, themes, and subjects. Youth, beauty, feminine subjectivity and community, gender construction and flower imagery run through each mode. The expressivity of emotion, passion, fleeting impressions, and bodily sensuality define each mode, despite the vastly different historical and cultural contexts. Like the fantastical spaces of myth and fancy found in Rococo art, *shōjo manga* feature large, expressive page spreads emphasizing the feminine face and body against abstract backgrounds that externalized and project internal emotions. This form encompasses a highly subjective space of narrative: distinctive as a "pastiche of frames" which utilize "overlapping and cascading panels, fade-outs, close-ups, and panels that fall off the page edge…in order to express inner thoughts…memories…and feelings."[27] Both styles emphasize tactility of surface and exaggerated play of light, most manifest in the pervasive sparkle reflected in *shōjo* spaces and eyes.

The ordinary and fairytale are fused in *shōjo* through embellished romance, convoluted narratives of transgression, and fleeting, often nostalgic, impressions. Emotions, depicting them and evoking them, lay at the heart of both. To feel the warm sentimentality of girlhood, whether in high school or idealized peasant life, or the joy of being a young woman in love is imparted by way of material and emotional excess. A sly playfulness with classical forms and delicate eroticism underlie elaborate spaces and dramas. Girl/nature metaphors abound, flowers and gardens realized as symbols of both an innocence and an untamed (sexual) potential. *The Rose of Versailles* exemplifies the

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[27] Ibid, 49.

connections between *shōjo* and Rococo with many of the same strategies that *Lady Oscar* employs: the historical period location and costume, the playfully subversive narrative of gender, romance, and court intrigue, and the underlying politics regarding production, consumption, class and power structures. When combined *shōjo* and Rococo conventions amplify the dreaminess, the unreality of emotion, and the artifice that speaks to an everyday, embodied female experience.

Written and serialized from 1972-1973 in Shueisha Publishing Company's *shōjo* magazine *Margaret*, *The Rose of Versailles* has long since been recognized as one of the most popular and transformative works within the *shōjo* industry. Ikeda and her contemporaries (Hagio Moto, Takemiya Keiko, Ōshima Yumiko, Yamato Waki, and Kihara Toshie among others), known as the Shōwa 24 Group (*24 nen gumi*), were a group of female manga artists who broke into the male-dominated industry to form the modern *shōjo* genre.[28] The *manga* produced by these women took on different, more serious and psychological, tones than earlier comics for young girls. *The Rose of Versailles*, a comic which began as a youthful comedy about Marie Antoinette, gradually introduced and navigated difficult issues of politics, gender, and sexuality, featuring an unexpected depth of character and emotion.[29] The culmination of Ikeda's risky venture into the *shōjo* market is the complex and widely beloved character of Oscar.

As a gender-bending, noble protagonist, Oscar is part of a legacy begotten by Tezuka Osamu, a foundational comic artist who developed early *manga* style that has

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[28] The group was named Shōwa 24 because many of the women were born in or around 1949, alternatively the year Shōwa 24. Ibid, 47-8.

[29] Shamoon, "Revolutionary Romance," 5.

since become a major industry. Throughout the 1950s, Tezuka drew what can be considered as the progenitor of *shōjo* comics, *Princess Knight* (*Ribon no kishi*) which follows the adventures of Princess Sapphire, Prince of Silverland. To inherit her throne, Sapphire must be a Prince instead of a Princess, and so spends her adventures as a boy to save her kingdom. These themes of nobility, the collapsing of the gender binaries, performance of masculinity, and the central romance are themes that would appear again in *The Rose of Versailles* and other *shōjo*. Tezuka's inspiration for *Princess Knight* has been tied to the influence of Disney's animation (most visually in debt to Disney's 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*), but also with the tradition of the Takarazuka Revue: a theater company made up entirely of unmarried women founded in 1914 and still active today in Takarazuka, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan.[30]

Girls' culture and comics thus have a long legacy of mobilizing and celebrating gendered ambiguity through theatrical spectacle from the Takarazuka Revue. The "top star" of each production is the *otoko yaku* ("male role"), the "male" performers who are the most popular figures in the company and who are paired with "female" counterparts, the *musume yaku* ("girl role"). The contrasting dynamic between exaggerated masculinity and femininity is central to the company's shows and reputation. As the Takarazuka Revue website explains: "Despite being women the *otoko yaku* wear an air of male sexuality, while the *musume yaku* help them stand out. If one or the other were gone, the Takarazuka Revue would be nothing."[31] The *otoko yaku* are described as having "a

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[30] Tezuka grew up in Takarazuka, and was exposed to and influenced by the Revue, of which he was both a fan and employee of from childhood to early adulthood. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan,* 253-4.

[31] "The Takarazuka Revue's Allure."

presence that makes them seem 'cooler' than real men," a sentiment that is reminiscent of Oscar's fans, who valued her above all the other characters, both as a figure of admiration and identification. The contrast of masculinity and femininity also underlines a foundational relationship between Oscar and Marie Antoinette as foils. Their respective, adopted gendered behavior leads to and further emphasizes their conflicting natures and destinies.

In 1974, just a year after the comic ended serialization, the Takarazuka Revue performed their own adaptation of *The Rose of Versailles*, to great acclaim. Still performed periodically, *The Rose of Versailles* has proven to be the most popular show in the company's history.[32] The interweaving and looping links between the development of *shōjo* traced back to Tezuka's androgynous Princess, itself shaped by the Takarazuka Revue foreground how central the notion of androgyny (gendered/sexual deviance and fluidity) is to the *shojō* mode, historically and conceptually.[33] This kind of androgyny particularly emphasizes the performative and artificial aspects of gender. In a broad survey of Japanese gender conventions *A Japanese Mirror*, Ian Buruma describes the effect of the *otoko yaku* as similar to the Kabuki traditions of female impersonation (*onnagata*): "no real man can ever be as beautiful as a woman playing a man, just as no woman is quite as stunning as a skillful female impersonator" for a non-impersonator "lacked the beauty of artifice."[34] Femininity/masculinity, in their most pure forms, can

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[32] Abbitt, "Androgyny and Otherness," 251.

[33] Hori, "Tezuka, Shōjo Manga, and Hagio Moto," 14.

[34] Buruma, *A Japanese Mirror*, 115-116.

only be donned and performed. Artifice is perceived as the only means to access these distilled forms, through rigid conventions and exaggeration.

Erica Abbitt explores the connections between gender slippage in Japanese theater and the performance of cultural Otherness, particularly the exoticized Western world in her article "Androgyny and Otherness: Exploring the West Through the Japanese Performative Body." Using the Takarazuka Revue's performances of *The Rose of Versailles* as one intersection of performed gender and performed history, Abbitt argues that androgyny as performance serves as a liminal space to explore the "Other": "… androgyny has proved useful as a means to navigate unknown space in performance—not only the unmapped territory between male and female, or gay and straight, but also the juncture between expectation and reality, history and fiction, other and self."[35] As only the *otoko yaku* can perform beautiful masculinity, a concept of "Frenchness" and "Rococo" as a style and history tied to the French Revolution may in many ways only be performed by an appropriating culture. *The Rose of Versailles*, as manga, anime and play, represents an alternative history, a space of potential, a fantasy grounded in a shared imagination.

Trying to capture the meaning and experience of Takarazuka Revue, Buruma describes: "I once asked a Takarazuka actress what had attracted her to this type of theatre. *Akogare*, she replied, a word usually translated as 'yearning', 'longing' or even 'adoration'. It is used for people, places and ideals that seem impossibly far way, such as for example *akogare no Pari*, Paris of our dreams. It is the idealization of the

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[35] Abbitt, "Androgyny and Otherness," 251.

unattainable…"[36] The Takarazuka spectacle markets the performance of dreams, immersive artifice that overwhelms the spectator. This rhetoric of dreams resonates with the larger discourse of *shōjo bunka* but also with Rococo ideals of fantasy, myth, and the fantastical conveyed through expressive, excessive construction. The mystique of the androgynous figure, an ideal that embodies the uncertain state between genders, cultures, and histories is made most visible through the art of artifice: it is "the fracture between appearance and reality and the search for identity in a mythologized West."[37] Instead of using an Other to recognize and demarcate a Self, the binary collapses together undermining the preexisting and assumed boundaries.

The role of androgyny in the Neo-Rococo not only allows for the visual collapse of gender and culture (temporally and geographically) into blatant artifice and fantasy, it also sustains alternate forms and expressions of sexuality. *The Rose of Versailles* manga and anime both draw upon the Takarazuka model of gender performance: a tall woman with a relatively deep voice and the mannerisms of a gentlemen. This tradition resonates with the physical androgyny of the *bishōnen* ("beautiful boy") aesthetic. Oscar and many of the male characters surrounding her have long hair, slim bodies, big eyes, and generally androgynous features, a more delicate and feminine articulation of male bodies. A cultural standard of attractiveness, the *bishōnen* is a staple of *manga* as well as *shōjo*. *Shōjo* narratives that have male protagonists feature overtly feminized characters, physically transcendent figures that allow girls to identify with but also be empowered

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[36] Buruma, *A Japanese Mirror*, 121.

[37] Abbitt, "Androgyny and Otherness," 253.

Catriona MacColl as Oscar

through fantasizing masculine experience and privilege. Conventions of internal and emotional development play out in male homosexual narratives, increasing the fantasy and potential for transgression.[38] Around the same time Ikeda produced *The Rose of Versailles*, other *shōjo* authors explored these proto-*shōnen ai* ("Boys Love"/BL) narratives, expanding the capacity for gender and sexual fluidity. Considering Oscar's predominantly masculine identification and her romantic interest in other men, *The Rose of Versailles* explores male homosexual tensions to some extent. While Oscar spends much of the story in love with Antoinette's secret lover, Count Axel von Fersen, she falls in love with and consummates her love with her manservant and best friend, André Grandier.

[38] Shamoon, "Revolutionary Romance," 7.

While the narrative of Oscar's life establishes blurry boundaries of identity in regards to socially constructed gender roles, Demy augments this ambiguity even further with his visual choices and style. The role of Oscar called for an actress with blonde curly hair, blue eyes, and at least basic skills in fencing and horse-riding due to the very limited production schedule. Demy found the British actress Catriona MacColl befitting the role, although she was later criticized as being "too feminine." Most cite her voice as being too high and her make-up too heavy.[39] It has been suggested that Oscar could only have been authentically and competently performed by a trained *otoko yaku*, who could bring decades of *shōjo* tradition to the character.[40] The general disdain for the French film by the Japanese fandom and critics reveals how an adaptation from fluid comic form to live-action movie encountered difficulties in translation as well as how a French interpretation challenges the imagined and exoticized foreign setting. Considered within Demy's body of work, MacColl's overt femininity does not work against Oscar's androgyny or the exploration of gendered boundaries. Like the members of the court of Versailles, the spectator is never unaware of Oscar's sex. She is not a manly woman because she physically looks like, embodies or sounds like a man, but because she performs the socially prescribed traits and role of a man, in line with Butler's theory. Demy is also, ultimately, interested in a fundamentally different queer narrative than Ikeda's original sets up.

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[39] The commission of the film included a sponsorship and marketing campaign for a Shiseido make-up line in which MacColl became central to ads for lipstick. Ibid, 121.

[40] Shamoon cites Takayama Hideo. "Revolutionary Romance," 14.

Deborah Shamoon, in an article "Revolutionary Romance: *The Rose of Versailles* and the Transformation of Shojo Manga" and in her later book *Passionate Friendship,* has examined Oscar's appeal through the conventions of homosocial/homoerotic/ homosexual same-sex love (identified as *dōseiai*). She positions Oscar as a challenge to the problematic but prevalently unbalanced heterosexual relationship structure most often depicted in *shōjo.* The *dōseiai* pairing historically functions less as gay/lesbian equivalents to heterosexual relationships so much as demarcating a safe containment of young, pre-marriage female sexuality. The *dōseiai* is a strategy of prolonging adolescence and pushing back the more adult, heterosexual relationships, particularly marriage as reproductive and societal conversion. This manifests in a girls' culture that celebrates sameness: pairs of girls who look and behave like each other, to reflect and reaffirm a sense of Self as a young girl, a *shōjo*.[41]

Shōjo as an identity, as a category of young and unmarried girls in between states of child and adult, informs the media produced by and for this audience. As Sharon Kinsella describes in her article on the converging trend of cute or *kawaii* culture in 1970s Japan:

> The position of the young married woman in contemporary Japanese society represents greater freedom than that of the young man. Young women—by virtue of the strength of their oppression and exclusion from most of the labour market and thus from active social roles—have come to represent in the media the freest, most un-hampered elements of society. Young women pushed outside mainstream

[41] Ibid, 5.

> Japanese society are associated with an exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfillment, decadence, consumption and play.[42]

The excessive material culture of *kawaii* was the convergence of prolonged childhood, a willful feminine, rampant consumerism, and modish foreign influence; various shades of perceived "freedom" and rebellion against "adult" obligations. As Kinsella notes, the gender dynamics are tied to expectations of age and a generational transition into participating in a capitalist market. The role of the unmarried girl in Japanese society has historically been perceived as the freest from these obligations and expectations. The growing up narrative for Japanese girls, central to *shōjo bunka*, interrogates the transitional time between childhood and adulthood, most conventionally framed as the transition from child/girl to adult/wife, a categorical shift emphasizing social subservience and containment of femininity.

As an attempt to redefine male/female roles within these broader contexts, *The Rose of Versailles* plays with these cultural tensions and categories. Instead of moving from the supposed complete freedom of the *shōjo* to the most constraining strata of Japanese society of the housewife, Oscar negates this transformation by crossing gender and class, by extending her androgynous status and privilege into adulthood and marriage. Oscar and André are presented as equals in the relationship, or as Shamoon argues, Oscar is the masculine woman to André's emasculated man. They are able to reach the status as equals through narrative structure (e.g. Oscar as noble, André as servant), as well as visually through depicting a *dōseiai* pairing where they begin to dress

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[42] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 244.

and behave in similar ways. Yet this is an evolution of the *dōseiai* structure as it is imposed onto a heterosexual, adult relationship instead of pre-marriage youth. This extension of girl's culture into broader societal norms demonstrates Ikeda grappling with and challenging *shōjo* romantic conventions to devise more satisfying relationship narratives for Japanese girls.[43]

The *dōseiai* development in *The Rose of Versailles* anime and in Demy's film

Demy's film inherited some of these formal patterns of Japanese gender and sexual organization, such as Oscar and André resembling each other in a *dōseiai*-like manner, but without the same cultural connotations and context. Within Demy's status as a queer filmmaker, Duggan argues that *Lady Oscar* is his "coming-out" film. The film not only foregrounds Oscar's complicated personal and political confusion surrounding her own identity, but also is the first of his films to feature a same-sex kiss.[44] Following Western notions of homosexuality and gender identity, Demy visually and conceptually interrogates Oscar's acceptance of a queer identity and subsequent (but ultimately tragic) liberation from the structures imposed upon her. While it is also a tale of growing up, Demy's Oscar is growing into political awareness and activity rather than marriage, in

[43] Shamoon, "Revolutionary Romance," 15.

[44] Duggan, *Queer Enchantments*, 127.

more Western notions of growing up into individual emancipation.[45] This tension within Oscar's liminal and queer tale is most manifest in the film's pendant ball scenes.

In a Cinderella twist of narrative, Oscar "disguises" herself as a woman to attend a ball in order to attract the attentions of Count Fersen. She arrives in a splendid white dress, hair made-up, and assumed demureness. Upon entering the ball, she is immediately framed by the stage-like entrance, red curtains pulled aside to emphasize the performance she is about to give. She also commands spectators. As she floats around the crowd, people of the court turn to stare in surprise, nonrecognition, and admiration. Fully embodying femininity for the first and only point in the film, she becomes the center of the gaze. One nobleman vies for her attention, complimenting her feminine beauty and presence: "Like a cool breeze on a hot summer day, you have refreshed me with your presence. Ah, you are silent, too. How wondrous. A beautiful woman should be silent. Does a rose speak when spoken to? No, the glorious thing simply lifts its face to the sun and allows each passerby to drink in its beauty." Suddenly recognizable as a woman, Oscar is almost immediately approached and objectified.

Coded as a decorative image and object, Oscar-as-feminine is dismissed as harmlessly pleasurable. Not meant to be taken seriously, not meant to have opinions, a voice, or even feelings as a woman, Oscar fades into the image. Surrounded by the Rococo setting, Oscar's identity is lost to the ornate, like the wallpaper-feminine parallels from *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and Coppola'a *Marie Antoinette*. She suddenly fits into traditional systems and visuals, suppressing a queer body and identity. Galt describes

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[45] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 242.

a similar political use of Rococo aesthetics and objects by Coppola's version of the Queen: "Marie Antoinette stages the fetishistic status of the royal body as a question of production design. The film connects a feminized world of objects…with the class and gender politics within which Marie's body can be owned first by the state and then violently by the people."[46] Oscar's object-hood is complete when she poses as the feminine; body constrained through dress, setting, and manners, meant to be seen but not scrutinized. She even gives up her legal identity for the night, telling Fersen that she is a cousin of Oscar's, a female facade who remains nameless. Never replying to her unwanted suitor, Oscar turns away, walks away, and refuses to engage in the interaction. Her silence, though, is one of resistance. The film's striking contrast of her masculine and feminine personas urge greater perusal of the image; the "pretty", because it is in opposition to and conflict with the masculine, demands to be looked at and acknowledged, to speak through excessive visual display instead of silenced by it.

Oscar performing femininity at the Queen's ball

The explicit comparison to a rose evokes Rococo conventions that employ cultural parallels between gardens/flowers and women. Gardens are domestic spaces caught between a contradictory status: either artificially-constructed nature or naturally-fabricated artifice. Women's bodies are similarly conceived of in these in-between states,

[46] Galt, *Pretty*, 22.

simultaneously too natural and too made-up. A favorite setting of the Rococo painting, gardens externalize the artifice and natural female body onto the landscape, encoding the spaces and scenes as feminine. The connection between femininity and flowers, drawing on the history of pithy turns of phrase and poetic metaphors comparing the female form through flower imagery, was often used by Rococo as caricature. Surrounding female subjects with cloth flowers on dresses, painted on wallpapers, or exaggerated scenes of shrubbery, Rococo pointed to the blatant artifice. The trope is taken further in *Lady Oscar* and *The Rose of Versailles.* The titular "rose" in the anime refers to Oscar, as the opening sequence illuminates. Alternating between the sheen and gloss of rose petals and glimmering fields, the sequence alludes to the underlying violence of these images, to a system that entraps young women.

Beginning and ending images of *The Rose of Versailles* anime opening

The first image of the opening is of Oscar's nude body. Tinted red, ensnared by thorny vines, with her shoulders curled forward in vulnerability, Oscar's trapped silhouette is included in the title card. As confining, curling trees give way to an open, pastel field and fluttering petals, Oscar's windblown figure, unrestrained and uniformed, stands against the landscape. Corresponding to her vulnerable body, a white rose fades into bright red: from a state of white and untouched purity to a stained color associated

with both passion and blood. The accompanying song sings of "nameless flowers that bloom amidst a field of grass. If they do nothing but sway in the gentle breeze, that's fine, but I was born with the destiny of a rose. Born to live in glory and passion. Roses…they bloom with dignity…they scatter with beauty." The petals reprise what Honda Masuko has termed the "*hirahira"*: "the movements of objects, such as ribbons, frill, or even lyrical word chains, which flutter in the breeze as symbols of girlhood."[47] The girly costumes and objects inhabiting the *shōjo* space, the frills, and ribbons that drape the female characters in Ikeda's comic and the anime amplify the flower-like qualities of the feminine body and emphasize the transient nature of girlhood.

As Aso Noriko notes in her analysis of the opening: "the rose became a symbol… for a beauty that was noble and born of great pain…In the course of the series, rosehood is redefined through Oscar to be a sisterhood composed of strong, exceptional women—good and bad—who share knowledge of pain."[48] To be a rose, a symbol of beautiful and objectified femininity, is to suffer. It is to exceed and rebuff the oppressive structures that confine the feminine to the pretty image: to be hyper visible to compensate for a lack of power and voice and be punished for that existence. By the end, though, in the last image of the opening, Oscar wields a sword. Some of the vines are cut away, her head thrown back and body thrust forward in a much more powerful pose. She is never freed from the trap completely, but is able to enact change on her surroundings and bodily autonomy. These themes, of challenging power structures through excessive visual display, play out

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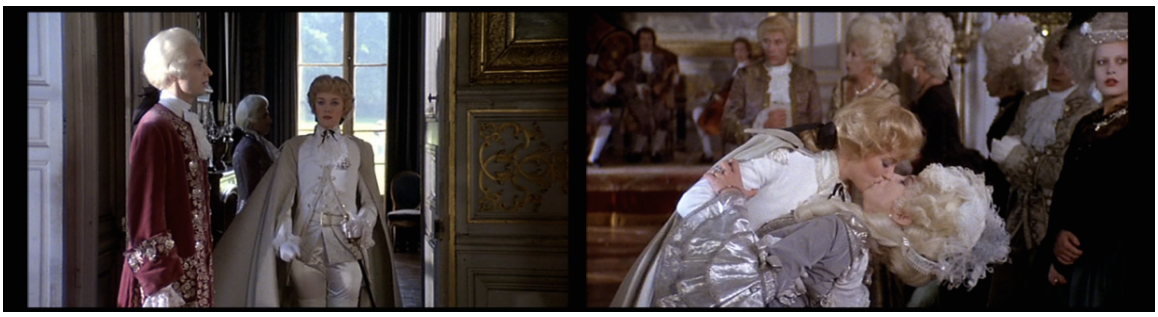
[47] Honda, "The Genealogy of *hirahira*," 19-20.

[48] Aso, "Revolutionary Girls," 3-4.

much more broadly in the actual narrative of the anime and the film, but find cultural resonance through the ironically stated and displayed flower imagery.

It is through assuming male behavior and prerogative, whether conceptualized in the form of costume and bearing or possession of a sword, that Oscar not only challenges the structures around her, she finds escape through transgression, of gender/sexuality and of class. While she spends most of the film upholding class boundaries and aristocratic privilege, motivated by her father's authority, she eventually comes to embrace not only the lower class André as her lover, but also the cause of the masses at the beginning of the French Revolution. Oscar is pushed to her own limits when she is pressured by her father to marry a nobleman favored for his connections and money: here, her privilege through masculine social standing is undermined by her biological status. The second ball scene in *Lady Oscar*, a party for Oscar's engagement to Count of Girodelle (Martin Potter), presents Oscar at her most masculine. In fierce defiance to her fiancé's wishes that she wear something "most becoming of [her] womanhood," Oscar arrives in full formal male regalia, in white matching her ball dress. She stalks up to her father and fiancé, the two men responsible for pressuring her into this marriage, flourishes her cape and taunts



Oscar at her engagement ball

them. When she fails to upset Girodelle, she takes the performance further by picking out a court lady to dance with, flirt with, and ultimately kiss.

Before Oscar's dramatic entrance, a trio of female guests express their dismay that marriage will end Oscar's masculine persona, one commenting: "Pity, she made such a gorgeous man." Once married, she will transfer from under her father's will to her husband's, from son/soldier to wife. Echoing the process of the *shōjo*, Oscar seeks to delay her marriage, thwarting the transition through gender and sexual transgression. It is only after breaking off her engagement that Oscar is finally able to pursue a relationship with André, entering an adult, heterosexual relationship on her own terms. In the *Rose of Versailles* anime, the narrative of the refused engagement is less explosive, drawn out as a side plot over several episodes and granting Oscar much more autonomy in her decision. The theme of unwanted marriage is instead explored through other female characters. Episode nineteen of the series, "Farewell, My Sister!", features one such plot and minor character: Charlotte, the young daughter the Duchess of Polignac. Charlotte, 11 years old, is engaged by her mother to a Duke, a known pedophile, against her will. During a court ball, while Oscar is patrolling the perimeter as a Royal Guard and comes across Charlotte in the gardens, Charlotte confesses: "I wish I could have grown a little more, fallen in love, and then become a bride to someone as wonderful as you, Lady Oscar." In love with the dashing charm and safety of Oscar, Charlotte is not ready for marriage or to enter the adult world. By the next ball, feeling cornered and trapped by her upcoming marriage, she leaps from the palace roof, choosing suicide and continued "purity" over marriage.

Compared to Oscar's rejection of unwanted marriage, Charlotte, without the age, experience, or masculine persona, lacks the advantage to escape from her situation alive.

Oscar's refusal also marks a turning point into class transgression as Demy's ball scene is followed by her wandering into a crowd surrounding a man speaking on the street against the monarchy, demanding a calling for the Estates General before he sets fire to straw dummies dressed as the King and Queen. While the sermon is broken up by the French Guard, Oscar is pulled off the street by André who tries to convince her to break ties with the aristocracy. She refuses, but before long, as the Estate General is opened and then closed, Oscar refuses military orders to shoot at the masses during a protest. She is subsequently disowned by her conservative father, and joins the people at the storming of the Bastille. This transformation is aided by her requested transfer from the Royal Guards to the French Guards, and further away from the Queen's court and closer to the lower class.

In the anime, Oscar's trajectory (from feminine to masculine, youth to adult) is augmented further by the shift in aesthetics, stylization, and tone. From the hyper-feminine, *shōjo* spaces of Versailles to the masculine barracks and streets of Paris, the show undergoes a change from the Rococo to a much more Neoclassical style and ethos, ending the anime leading the charge on the Bastille and embodied as a god of war. By the end of *The Rose of Versailles*, both André and Oscar are lost to the cause. In *Lady Oscar*, though, only André is killed at the end, leaving Oscar adrift in the celebrating masses, evolved into a wholly independent citizen.

The changing aesthetics of *The Rose of Versailles* anime from Rococo and feminine spaces (top) to the Neoclassical masculine effects (bottom)

Demy's ball scenes, for Duggan, realize a coming out narrative, of Oscar coming to accept herself as a masculine, queer woman, arguably transgendered.[49] And Oscar is undeniably a queer presence, transgressive of both traditional gender norms, class boundaries, and aesthetic modes. Her entrance into an adult relationship and acceptance of her own identity is thus accompanied by a greater social awareness and responsibility, and an admittance into a politically productive sphere. But this pattern, of identity and personal development, of change and adaptation, is also undeniably part of conventional *shōjo* narratives. Oscar dons femininity or masculinity to suit herself, exploiting her liminal status, as a masculine woman, a fictional character in a historical narrative, and as a young woman growing into adulthood. Demy's film uses Oscar's transgressive nature to defy traditional systems and to rewrite commonly rendered narratives of courtship, class, gender roles and storytelling. Rococo aesthetics make room for the expressive

[49] Duggan, *Queer Enchantments*, 127.

potential and power of feminine and queer constructions in various imagined alternatives to the predominant patriarchal power structures.

A History of Desire

The obvious but vital component of Oscar's shifting identity is her clothing. Both her matching ball costumes stand out, in terms of contrast and expense, but her gown, as the exception from the masculine uniform, is of particular interest. The ornate and lavish dress she wears to the Queen's ball is first introduced in Rose Bertin's dressmaker shop.[50] The female employees, sitting and sewing industriously, comment on the cycles of court fashion:

"When the ladies at court see [the Queen's gown], they'll all have to have one. In a slightly different shade, that is."

"The lords are selling their country estates to keep their ladies in fashion. Soon they'll be as hungry as we are."

"And we'll be the ones responsible for their downfall."

In this brief but incisive scene, Demy conveys a number of contexts surrounding the court systems of power and commerce. As the trendsetter for the court, Marie Antoinette, despite broad resentment from the court and french citizens, wielded consumer and social power. Financial freedom that would later doom her to history, Antoinette indulged in a rapturous system of fashion that would long outlast her lifetime.

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[50] Rose Bertin was the favored dressmaker for Marie Antoinette, widely successful thanks to the Queen's patronage, Bertin enjoyed unprecented access to the monarch and greatly influenced her style and consumption. Fraser, *Marie Antoinette*, 137.

In her book *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution,* Caroline Weber writes: "Marie Antoinette staged a revolt against entrenched court etiquette by turning her clothes and other accouterments into defiant expressions of autonomy and prestige…she identified fashion as a key weapon in her struggle for personal prestige, authority, and sometimes mere survival."[51] Exploring the mechanics and consequences of the French Queen's fashion, Weber outlines the high personal and political stakes invested in Antoinette's visual identity. Fashion was a major preoccupation of Versailles' occupants, who vied for social status by means of costume; a statement of identity and individuality directly inscribed onto their bodies. These systems of patronage and trends also informed the development of the Rococo period. As a system of exchange between patron and artist that fed into the fantasy desired by the court, Rococo artists succeeded by appealing to the personal, expressive, and imaginative wishes of their patrons, including painting impossible fashions and foregrounding the height of fashion in portraits.

Beyond even the court's ongoing interest and imitation, Marie Antoinette's systems of patronage and trendsetting spread throughout her domain, in the form of images, reports of expenses, and influence over even middle and lower class women's clothing trends. As Fraser notes in her biography of the Queen, Paris was a city that not only depended on the patronage of aristocrats to support the economy, it also relied on the city's reputation of being on the cutting edge of fashion; Marie Antoinette's notorious

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[51] Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 3.

Court women adopting Oscar's masculine dress

spending aided both.[52] As Madeleine Delpierre notes in a study of eighteenth-century dress: "Whether consciously or not, she made women's clothing (as was remarked by a contemporary chronicler) 'a political matter, through her influence on commerce and manufacture.'"[53] Even Oscar is caught up in this system, despite her minor outsider status. Court women delight in her masculinity, imitating it through hybrid fashions. Fusing it with popular feminine styles to present a different exercise in androgyny, the court women use it as a transgressive edge to set themselves apart, drawing on the success of Oscar herself.

Marie Antoinette recognizes Oscar's reluctant sway and exclaims: "Oh, don't you just love it? It's all so novel, so mysterious, so stylish! Did you know that several court ladies have begun to emulate you, Oscar? It's become the rage to dress in man's

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[52] Fraser, *Marie Antoinette*, 137.

[53] Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 110.

clothing." Partaking in the fashion paradox of trying to appear simultaneously individualistic and part of the group, all women of the court are part of this system, whether willingly or not. The networks of fashion and imitation circulated among the court establishes a feminine community bound together through experience, socially prescribed roles, and clothing. In addition, the shared consumerism and commodity culture offers routes of power and self-expression, of consumers and producers (such as female couriers like Bertin) alike. What makes the Rococo aesthetic a potential exercise in subversive power is the surrounding contexts of consumerism and consumption. From the historical period of Versailles through 1970s Japan/France to the present global economy, Rococo aesthetics interweave a number of economic systems to promote transgressive politics of subculture, class, and visual resistance through the construction of alternative spaces of fantasy and possibility.

One of the few articles to address the use of Rococo aesthetics in media is McKnight's piece on the politics underlying *The Rose of Versailles* and *Kamikaze Girls*. Arguing that each franchise modeled a different kind of subculture, McKnight emphasizes the modes of production and consumption informing the media. The "logic of the rococo" has been adopted and reprised in the *shōjo* subculture as a "consumer revolution" of the point of entry of women into a market.[54] *The Rose of Versailles* popularized "Frenchness in association with independence and autonomy," by putting the rise of the female *manga* artist and the mass entry of Japanese women into a developing consumerist market in the 1970s in dialogue with eighteenth-century feminine

[54] McKnight, "Frenchness and Transformation," 119.

consumerism (a "'consumer revolution' that provided women an entry into the marketplace during the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois regime") and positing the French Revolution as a populist movement.

McKnight ties the politics of *The Rose of Versailles* to a larger climate of industrial and political change in Japan:

> In the manga, the very term of 'self' cannot be thought outside of the issues that Ikeda dwells on: class consciousness, asymmetrical class relations between women, companionate marriage born of natural rights and naturally sexed bodies, a citizen's duty, and subjectivity grounded in the material conditions of labor… Oscar de Jarjeyes [introduces] the question of how to represent female entrance into the new bourgeois world in a postwar Japanese climate…[55]

During the disillusioned lull, post-student protests and riots surrounding the renewal of the U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty in 1970, Ikeda, a member of the Japanese Communist Part (JCP), was interested in telling a narrative of revolution. She conveys, through her use of Rococo aesthetics and parallels to the French Revolution, hope for a successful populist movement with universal application and with particular emphasis on the role of women during a revolutionary transition.[56] The revolutionary politics within *Rose of Versailles*, a refraction of a pivotal point in French/European/Western history and identity, are mapped onto the politics of post-war, consumerist Japan and vice versa.

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[55] Ibid, 120.

[56] Ibid, 121.

McKnight also writes about *Kamikaze Girls* as it provides a different function of Rococo presence than *The Rose of Versailles*. *Kamikaze Girls* is a trans-media franchise that originated as a light novel by Rococo enthusiast Takemoto Novala from 2002. The story was later adapted into a manga and a live-action film directed by Nakashima Tetsuya in 2004. Nakashima's film is a playful romp through teenage rebellion and millennial fashion centered on the friendship between two high school girls in rural Japan. The film's aesthetics emerge from the character of Ryugasaki Momoko (Fukada Kyōko), a girl dedicated to the Lolita fashion and lifestyle. She clashes with but eventually befriends the equally flamboyant Shirayuki Ichigo (Anna Tsuchiya), a high school delinquent (*yankī*). On the cusp of adulthood both struggle to define their identities and roles in society, reprising the same anxieties of transition as other *shōjo* literature. According to McKnight, in contrast to Ikeda's populist message in *The Rose of Versailles*, *Kamikaze Girls* posits a much more individualistic revolution on the level of social mobility, consumerism, and fashion.[57]

Lolita (*Roriita*) fashion originated as a subculture in the Harajuku district of Tokyo in the late 1990s, emerging from a blend of cute culture in the 1970s and the 1980s craze for visual-*kei* bands, who perform in elaborate make-up and costumes often in reference to Western court fashion.[58] Defined by a doll-like aesthetic with baby doll dresses, ruffles, ribbons, bonnets, and lace, Lolita assumes a romantic but remixed basis in Old World European court fashions and dress. Vaguely Victorian and Rococo, Lolita

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[57] "…the *zoku* model begins with a genre conscious of its global relation to other movements…it is less concerned with the origins of historicist subjectivity and more interested in how objects facilitate social mobility and how forms of exchange and markets underwrite identity." Ibid, 127.

[58] Winge, "Undressing and Dressing Loli," 49.

Ryugasaki Momoko, the protagonist of Nakashima's *Kamikaze Girls*, imaging herself in eighteenth-century France

culture embraces the overtly and extremely feminine.[59] In a broader study of Japanese street fashion, Kawamura Yuniya collected information and perspectives from Lolita participants. She found that many wore Lolita for self-expression and to stand out in a crowd. They also felt empowered by Lolita: by donning the complete look, they felt transformed and able to behave in new and freeing ways.[60] Marked by excess femininity, concern with surface, female consumption and subjectivity, nostalgia, and anachronism, Lolita presents another avenue of Japanese-inflected Neo-Rococo aesthetics expressed through the rhetoric of empowerment and self-expression of consumerism, community, personal fantasy, and a particular kind of historical memory.

Kamikaze Girls opens on the protagonist Momoko, in a white baby doll dress and matching platform boots, furiously scootering down a rural road. At an intersection she crashes into a produce truck and goes flying into the air with a shower of cabbage heads.

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[59] Lunning, "Under the Ruffles," 10.

[60] Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures,* 69.

Time slows down as she falls through the air, saying good-bye to her family and single friend, Ichigo. Her reverie concludes with "I wish I had been born in the Rococo era" before rewinding back to the beginning, before her birth, all the way back to eighteenth-century France. Taking on a sepia, wash out color tone with a grainy, filmic filter, the sequence elaborates on the nature and allure of Rococo and, thus Lolita, aesthetics and lifestyle. Momoko narrates as an imaginary court of Versailles is depicted, interwoven with Rococo paintings and sculpture: "Rococo: eighteenth-century France at its most lavish. It made Baroque look positively sober. An obscure, neglected period, rarely mentioned in class. Critics called its art 'cloying,' shallow, vulgar and indecent. Life then was like candy. Their world, so sweet and dreamy. That was Rococo." Momoko upholds the Rococo style and era's pleasures, leisure, indulgence, wealth, and dream-like quality as her own ideals: "I was smitten by Rococo. A frilly dress and strolls in the country. That's how I wanted to live." She uses her body and clothing to forge a direct relationship with the past, a constructed and misconstrued history.

Momoko and Ichigo find shared experience and meaning in their youthful consumerism and search for personal identity. Both struggle to define their current and future identities, ending the movie successfully transformed into reluctant but productive citizens: Momoko embroidering and designing the fashion she so loves and Ichigo subsumed into the Lolita economy by becoming a popular model. Lolita, an individualistic but commodified movement, is presented as a path to profitable membership in a capitalist and mass consumerist society. The central friendship begins with contrasting but shared experiences of being a teenage girl in Japan. Both girls are in

their second year of high school, but clearly define themselves outside that designation, rejecting normal dress and community for fringe subcultures and overtly counterculture modes of dress. When Ichigo first meets Momoko, she mistakes the protagonist as a young child because of her dress: "I figured only a child would wear that kind of frilly dress. I shouldn't judge by appearances." To which Momoko disagrees: "But appearance says everything." Within this simple declaration, the film foregrounds the very heart of Japanese Lolita fashion: that appearance in itself is a statement.

Kawamura characterizes the Lolita subculture as a "silent rebellion," a bodily and visual resistance to conforming to societal conventions of femininity and age.[61] As in other cultural expressions of girlhood and transition, *Kamikaze Girls* operates within anxieties about growing up. "Lolitas occupy a subcultural space where young women and men are empowered by the Lolita aesthetic to present themselves anachronistically in order to escape the trappings of adult life and with it the culture's dominant ideologies."[62] Resisting both the biological and social process of aging into adulthood, Lolitas adopt an aesthetic that minimizes their body, flattening their silhouettes and mannerisms into a simulacrum of childhood, an infantilized and outsider status further augmented by the foreign associations of Western dress.

Lolita and other expressions of *shōjo* or cute culture are also an exaggeration of perceived pre-existing stereotypes about young girls and women: "Aspects of cute culture engaged in by young women appear to respond to this criticism by defensively

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[61] Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures,* 68.

[62] Winge, "Undressing and Dressing Loli," 48.

strengthening a 'girl's only' culture and identity. Women debased as infantile and irresponsible began to fetishize and flaunt their *shōjo* personality still more, almost as a means of taunting and ridiculing male condemnation and making clear their stubborn refusal to stop playing, go home, and accept less from life."[63] Lolita fashion, like the rose imagery surrounding Oscar, is an excessive statement of femininity that challenges what is historically thought of as restricting or containing the feminine. As Hyde writes in the Afterword of *Rococo Echo*: "Momoko dreams of an idealized Rococo that valorizes the feminine" and describes her fashion-oriented lifestyle as a "delicate kind of revolt," an embodied and mannered resistance to the structures of power around her.[64] Conveyed through rituals of consumerism, surface appearance, excess, and exaggeratedly feminine qualities, this appropriation of Rococo ideals and aesthetics connects disparate settings through shared experiences.

Whether this was the reality of the court is less important than what Momoko has absorbed and decided to perpetuate. It presents a particular view on the court of Versailles: the perspective of a teenager looking for identity, against the bargain-sale masses, a look that speaks to her experience as a girl consumer. As a nonfictional subscriber to Lolita fashion stated in Kawamura's study: "I got interested in Lolita in my second year in high school after I saw a magazine *Alice*. My family did not like it [at] first…My boyfriend doesn't like me in Lolita, but I don't care. I feel happy when I am wearing Lolita. I enjoy people's attention. It is the image of Marie Antoinette."[65] The

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[63] Kinsella, Cuties in Japan, 250.

[64] Hyde, "Afterword," 343-4.

[65] Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures,* 70.

young girl here, disconnected (willfully or not) from the rest of the Queen's bloody legacy of the French Revolution, evokes the French Queen as a symbol of feminine resistance through fashion. It also re-emphasizes the youth at stake in the tragic life of a girl-queen, the Lolita consumer, and the nominal Lolita of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel; objects of desire reclaiming the name to become objects that desire.

The entwining of feminine community, consumerism, and consumption is a theme examined closely in Coppola's film. Marie Antoinette surrounds herself with other young women and together they shop, gamble, eat, and party. The most flagrant scene of this behavior is a three minute music video-like montage to a Kevin Shield remix of Bow Wow Wow's "I Want Candy." Dunst as Marie Antoinette is presented with shoes, cloths and clothes, champagne towers, and a medley of pastries and cakes. The elaborate displays of confectionery food and objects such as pink, candy-like betting chips, shoes, and jewelry are graphically and rhythmically matched through editing. Women consume food, dress, alcohol, and money in a pleasurable haze to the beat of the music. This explosion of sound and visuals follows a heartrending moment when Antoinette learns that her sister-in-law has given birth to a son, reminding her and everyone else that the Queen has yet to produce an heir. Marie Antoinette's elaborate costumes are not only a chief visual pleasure of the film, but also emphasize the expressive nature of her fashion as a young woman, evocative of an experience of entrapment, guilt, and societal pressures felt around the world and across time. The seemingly frivolous colors and spaces of the "pretty" are revealed to be highly politicized and invested with valid agitation.

Rococo, as a shared aesthetic, speaks to a collective feminine experience. Women of Versailles, even as they competed for status, all inhabited the same space and restrictions, and sought similar escape through visual expression. In *The Rose of Versailles*, this network of women is a major component of the narrative. Most of the major characters, heroines and villains, are female. Each exercises different types of power (Marie Antoinette as the Queen, Oscar through adoption of masculine roles and behaviors, Madame du Barry through sexual relations, Jeanne Valois through ruthless cleverness, Duchess of Polignac through feminine friendship) and most of them are punished for it. All of these female characters die, usually in a gruesome fashion, because they exceeded the structures imposed on them. This "sisterhood" born from the "knowledge of great pain" binds the women together and underscores the desperate wish to be free. This community within the narrative echoes communities of production and consumption surrounding the history of Versailles and Rococo as well as *shōjo* culture.

Shōjo bunka has been so enduring because it is a community that produces and consumes within itself. Since the industrial shift in the 1970s, with the breakthrough of the Shōwa 24, *shōjo* is a circulation between female producers and female consumers. As Jennifer Prough surveys in her book, the *shōjo* industry is built upon a cycle of consumers becoming producers through fan influence and fan works, such as the sub-industry of amateur publications and the serial form of many *shōjo* manga published in weekly/monthly magazines to allow for an active dialogue. This community of fan consumption and production amplifies the sense of a world a part, a fantasy that girls can escape into, as well as shape themselves. This specific mode of empowerment, to control

the creation and perpetuation of media, is undergirded by the same strategies as Rococo aesthetics: to make space for feminine and/or queer experiences and emotions. The material escape court women like Marie Antoinette exercised found new expression in Lolita culture, and more broadly *shōjo* culture. The Rococo style has found a pervasive and persistent role well after its original period in speaking to and for a shared liminal uncertainty and marginalization.

Conclusion

Fantasy and documented history blur within *Lady Oscar* and *The Rose of Versailles*. The fictional protagonist is interwoven with representations of historical persons and recorded events. Yet Oscar is unbound by historical record, empowered as a character to interfere with traditional or factual accounts. Even Marie Antoinette, liberated from French memory in Coppola's and Ikeda's retellings, is re-crafted into a sympathetic young girl and a charming Japanese princess, free to develop in the *shōjo* space of self-realization and interior growth. This freedom found in artifice does not reveal an "authentic" form of history, but instead focuses on broader transhistorical experience, drawing parallels between numerous historical circumstances across time, place, and societies. Rococo aesthetics speak to a transnational and transhistorical, potentially ahistorical, conception of girlhood.

It is an aesthetic that crosses time and space to appeal to cultures as separate as eighteenth-century France and 1970s Japan; different societies functioning in very different economic and technological realities. The universality of these modes of expression highlight the power of the decorative image and the appealing nature of self-expression by means of the strikingly visual. What connects the texts that have been associated with the Rococo together is a kind of marginalization, of author and/of audience. One of the few successful female independent filmmakers, Sofia Coppola found Rococo aesthetics as an effective and affective form of expression, as did Demy, a filmmaker who spent his career working through the queer, fantastical and taboo

underlying French culture and history. This is an impulse shared by the producers and consumers of *shōjo* cultures in literature, fashion, and art.

The endurance of Rococo aesthetics, into a Neo-Rococo mode and into cinema, across economies, nations, and decades, speaks to the deep relationship between the history and traditions of fine arts and film. As Galt outlines, the inherited hierarchies and tastes from the eighteenth century continue to shape creation and reception of cinema, often in unquestioned but pervasive trends and criticism. Along with these structures of value and visual orientation, forces of opposition also continue to co-exist, speaking to and of alternate experiences.

To end, I will briefly offer a number of further potential avenues to study the cinematic Rococo.

This project focused on the convergence of points within a single film and many of these themes can be further fleshed out, such as the role of Rococo aesthetics in the historical and cultural relationship between Japan and France. Historically, France has held a long aesthetic fascination with Japan, such as the Japonism movement in the 19th century. An active foreign market for the anime industry, France has, at least twice, invited Ikeda Riyoko to visit. Once in 2008, where the country honored her with the *Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur* (National Order of the Legion of Honor), the nation's highest honor of merit. The success of *The Rose of Versailles* in Japan and the subsequent "Beru-boom" incited a reciprocal interest.

For a study on gender and the politics of expression, there is very little discussion of feminist theory or the relationship between Rococo and feminism. There is a similar

lack on the dynamics of female spectatorship. What I can offer is a nod to the work of Jacki Willson. In her 2015 book, *Being Gorgeous: Feminism, Sexuality and the Pleasures of the Visual,* Willson challenges Laura Mulvey's enduring theory of the dominance of the "male gaze" in cinema. Willson presents a revised construction of female spectatorship, accounting for the changes in the film industry, feminist theory, and media within the last thirty years. Addressing the production along with the consumption of the pleasurable image, Willson describes a movement towards the freedom of fantasy: "The imagination does not speak of hard facts, of sexism and inequality, but it does speak about liberation through visual freedom…This spectacle of being gorgeous is about women's movement in visual culture from being sex objects to self-determined art objects."[66] In a re-appropriation of the feminine aesthetic in line with third wave feminism, Willson lobbies for the reclaiming the arbitrary, artificial, performative connotations of the feminine gender to convey a sense of empowerment through knowing consumption, imaginative creation, and female community.

Rococo's mode as an expression for the marginalized or historically excluded expands far beyond the scope of this paper, which is limited to a few, fairly privileged, media producers. Other essays in *Rococo Echo* offer more racially and ethnically diverse instances of the appropriation of Rococo, such as the work of British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare which fuses Rococo aesthetics and post-colonialism or the Rococo aesthetics of hip-hop artist Nick Minaj as a knowing and self-fashioning celebrity and

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[66] Willson, *Being Gorgeous*, 7.

purveyor of contemporary artifice, excessive femininity, and performance.[67] There are also more recent examples of Rococo settings and narratives in media. The most recent film I mention is from over a decade ago. I can point to two current relevant texts: *Versailles,* a TV series that has been shown on a global scale, airing on television channels in France, Canada, Britain, and the United States and the Rococo pastiche aesthetics in the music videos of Canadian musician Grimes, who also draws on Japanese urban pop culture in her image and style.

The relationship between revived Rococo aesthetics and postmodern aesthetics bears further consideration, particularly in reference to the Neo-Baroque. As defined by Angela Ndalianis and applied to high concept films from the 1970s-80s, the Neo-Baroque might offer a revivalist contrast to contemporary Rococo. The Neo-Baroque, as with the historical Baroque period, tends to be coded as masculine, in its subjects, violence, and target audience, and have been studied most prominently in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres (such as the *Star Wars, Terminator* and *Alien/Predator* franchises, *Evil Dead* series, and subsequent video games). In contrast, contemporary uses of Rococo aesthetics are utilized to indicate a feminine space, subjectivity, and/or narrative. Further parsing of the relationship between a Neo-Baroque aesthetic and the less studied Rococo might offer a broader definition of aesthetic revival patterns as well as a greater scope of Rococo aesthetics, outside the few films addressed in my article.

The legacy of *The Rose of Versailles* and Rococo aesthetics in Japanese media continues to reference Oscar-inspired characters: handsome and princely girls/women.

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[67] See Sarah Wilson's "Post-Colonial Rococo: Yinka Shonibare MBE plays Fragonard," in *Rococo Echo* and Hyde, "Afterword," 347.

The Rose of Versailles was an important source of inspiration for Ikuhara Kunihiko's *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (*Shôjo kakumei Utena* [1997]), another classic anime that utilizes complex, ambiguous narratives and visuals of androgynous characters/ characteristics and depictions of homosexuality to interrogate gender, power, and modernity. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* violently plays out in fairytale castles and rose-saturated fantasy, fusing the the feminine Rococo with starker imagery of masculine modernity. A study into this striking and distinctive revision of Rococo aesthetics and Western imagery would further nuance the Rococo-anime aesthetics found in *shōjo* media.

Appendix: Literature Review

Project

What does a cinematic Rococo aesthetic look like? How and why are Rococo aesthetics used in modern media? What is modern Rococo's relationship to the eighteenth-century and the French Revolution? Where and why has Rococo style reemerged?

Seeking to investigate and answer these broad questions has led to two connected areas of study: the oeuvre of Jacques Demy and Japanese *shōjo* culture. The two topics are connected through Demy's 1979 film *Lady Oscar*, a live-action adaptation of a *shōjo* franchise, that connects the transnational and transhistorical concerns of these subjects through the use of Rococo aesthetics.

Rococo in Film

Despite the frivolous reputation of the Rococo (in this project, specifically the French Rococo), the movement has since been redefined and studied for its seditious qualities, noted by art historians like William Park, Katie Scott, Melissa Hyde, and literary scholar Allison Stedman.[68] Rococo, beyond the flowing, curling lines, the mythic and whimsical escapism, the pastel colors, and floral motifs, is closely tied to the power of the visual. Reacting against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the age of Absolutism, the Rococo functioned as a feminine mode of expression that collapsed traditional binaries of art ("artificial, constrained, ancient, aristocratic, high, superficial, and ironic") and nature ("natural, free, modern, middle class, low, subjective, and

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[68] See Park, *The Idea of the Rococo,* Scott, *The Rococo Interior,* Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo* and Stedman, *Rococo Fiction in France, 1600-1715.*

passionate").[69] Park describes the Rococo as a Revolution, in painting and in fluidity of form and space, as well as shifting social dynamics.[70] It was a moment in which visual representation was highjacked by feminine modes of emotion, subjectivity, and surface.

Within the study of Rococo as an art period, style, and concept, there has been a smaller movement to explore the later contexts of Rococo aesthetics. Since the publication of Carol Duncan's *The Pursuit of Pleasure: The Rococo Revival in French Romantic Art* in 1976, Rococo has been revisited by art historians as a revivalist aesthetic. More recently, the field has probed the possibilities of the reemergence through a 2014 anthology, *Rococo Echo: Art, History and Historiography from Cochin to Coppola*, edited by Melissa Lee Hyde and Katie Scott. Spanning time from the French Revolution to the past ten years, *Rococo Echo* highlights a variety of reutilized and re-contextualized instances of Rococo aesthetics across the globe.

One of the essays featured in the anthology by Rebecca Arnold titled "The New Rococo: Sofia Coppola and Fashions in Contemporary Femininity" argues for the presence of Rococo aesthetics in Coppola's first three films, particularly *The Virgin Suicides* from 1999 and the 2006 *Marie Antoinette*.[71] Through the emphasis on female community, nostalgia, subjectivity, anachronistic features, pastel color schemes, Coppola's films reprise a kind of Rococo logic and schema. While many of these themes will be further explored in my own article, I will expand the limits of a cinematic Rococo's global and temporal relevance by focusing on French and Japanese media as

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[69] Park, *The Idea of the Rococo*, 36.

[70] Ibid, 50.

[71] Arnold also attempts to, unconvincingly, apply Rococo aesthetics to Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation.*

well as considering the relevance of queer identities and alternate modes of girlhood explored. With occasional reference to *Marie Antoinette*'s visually spectacular aesthetics and politics, this project will consider the multiplicity of histories and experiences bound up in Rococo models of expression and imagination.

As a historical personage, Marie Antoinette is an important touch point for the historical period. Still haunted by the specter of the French Revolution, the gaiety of the Rococo celebration of youth, desire, and escapism is tinged with the violent and bloody outcome of the court's lavish lifestyle. Marie Antoinette was a public figure who inspired incensed discourse during her rule as queen and continues to be the subject of rigorous debate and studies on the structure of historical narrative, gender, and class. Coppola's period film is based on a recent biography by Antonia Fraser, who provides a sympathetic account of the young Queen. Similarly, Ikeda's original comic was inspired and informed by Stefan Zweig's 1933 *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman*, an earlier sympathetic biography. The French Queen has also been studied for her use of fashion, self-construction, and as a spectacle of female consumption. Caroline Weber's *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* looks into the court structures that granted Antoinette means to access power and self-expression.

The other notable scholarly undertaking of Rococo aesthetics in film and media is Anne McKnight's "Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972-2004" which addresses the politics underlying Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* manga and Nakashima Tetsuya's *Kamikaze Girls* as expressed through Rococo. McKnight develops an argument based on commodity models of Japanese subculture, conceived as "a

community formed around the conventions of representations in one medium of information culture (manga, anime, heavy metal fans, and so on)."[72] She expounds upon two models of subculture and media that utilize the "logic of rococo:" a populist agenda in *shōjo* literature via *Rose of Versailles* and a more individualistic mode of consumerism and self-dependence found in *Kamikaze Girls*. Particularly interested in historical parallels of the entry of women into productive markets, McKnight provides a compelling articulation of the connection between politics and Rococo aesthetics based on self-expression, consumerism, Neo-Baroque forms, and feminine communities. My article will elaborate on McKnight's argument by incorporating the contexts and histories surrounding Lolita fashions, as well as extending these themes to *Lady Oscar*.

***Lady Oscar* and Jacques Demy**

What has been written on Demy's *Lady Oscar* is very little and mostly negative. While it is covered in books about Demy and his body of work, the film has rarely warranted its own study. Occasionally mentioned in relation to *The Rose of Versailles*, reviews of the film almost never come out favorably; as an adaptation it has been largely found lacking. Deborah Shamoon, in her article "Revolutionary Romance: *The Rose of Versailles* and the Transformation of Shojo Manga" deciphering the historical and cultural context for *shōjo* romantic conventions, describes the film as a failure, claiming "the film lacks any coherence or resolution. Perhaps the larger problem for the live-action film is that the mimetic style of mainstream cinema is simply not compatible with the melodramatic, fantastic mode of *shōjo* manga." As I hope my article will show,

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[72] McKnight, "Frenchness and Transformation," 125.

Shamoon's assessment of this film is both reductive and wrong. Anne Duggan has noted the deficiency in Shamoon's characterization that excludes consideration of Demy's other work. In the most extended and useful analysis of *Lady Oscar* in both a chapter in her book, *Queer Enchantments: Gender, Sexuality, and Class in the Fairy-Tale Cinema of Jacques Demy,* and in an earlier article "The Revolutionary Undoing of the Maiden Warrior in Ikeda's *Rose of Versailles* and Jacques Demy's *Lady Oscar,*" Duggan balances the text's adapted nature with Demy's distinctive style in an exploration of gender and queerness.

But even Duggan's assessment, which emphasizes the Warrior Maiden fairytale narrative and the class politics present in the film, does not wholly account for the complicated contexts surrounding the translation and adaptation of a manga comic into transnational live-action movie. Focusing on the fairytale mode and less on formal aesthetics, Duggan's description has room for the relevance of Rococo aesthetics. Comparing the concerns of Ikeda's original and Demy's version, Duggan also argues that Ikeda primarily set out to challenge gender structures and uses class conflict to further the romantic and emotional tensions while Demy does the opposite, using melodramatic narrative and gendered queerness to develop complex class politics. While I agree that *Lady Oscar* requires a place in both Demy's oeuvre and *shōjo* conventions, Duggan underestimates the role of gender in the film as well as the class politics underlying *The Rose of Versailles*. Demy's preoccupation with class is also echoed by the brief section of Darren Waldron's book, *Jacques Demy,* on the parallels of gendered and class

transgression. Further analysis of the role of Rococo aesthetics in conjunction with the origins in *shōjo* culture will fill in these gaps surrounding the film's complicated politics.

This project will also contribute an alternative classification of the director in film history and canon. Thanks to the restoration efforts of Agnès Varda, Jacques Demy's work has enjoyed a revival in contemporary film circuits and discourse of the past decade. His effusive style committed to sensual lyricism, florid color, impressionistic and emotional melodrama, and an expansive filmic vision continues to leave a strong imprint on spectators. His legacy has also been carried on through the more recent films of Damien Chazelle, Baz Luhrmann, Chantal Akerman, Serge Bozon, Leos Carax, Olivier Ducastel, Jacques Martineau, François Ozon, João Pedro Rodrigues, and Christophe Honoré, which all bear the influences of Demy.[73] Yet, despite recent and notable efforts to study and understand his films, Demy's body of work has historically often been dismissed when his light touch is mistaken for flippant artifice and spectacle. Specifically, Demy's status as a French filmmaker on the margins of the epochal French New Wave has complicated the reception and contextualizing of his films that largely fall outside the gritty, masculine, fiercely independent movement. And even though Demy has also been associated with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s counterpart movement, the Left Bank, his connection to the French New Wave remains based on industrial and personal networks rather than stylistic affiliations.

Lola, Demy's first feature film from 1961, is principally a New Wave film, from its crew to its execution. The film's funding was aided by Jean-Luc Godard, who

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[73] Quandt, "*Jacques Demy, A to Z.*"

introduced Demy to Georges de Beauregard, producer of the film. *Lola* was made very cheaply for around the price of Godard's 1960 *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*) with a skeleton crew, without sound, and shot by the iconic New Wave cinematographer Raoul Coutard. The circumstances of filming were enabled by the New Wave networks, but the film was greatly altered from Demy's original vision: a full color musical that would have been much more expensive and probably much more like his later work. Without the funding to make such a film, Demy fell into line with de Beauregard's offer for a small budget film. His second feature, *Bay of Angels* (1962) starring Jeanne Moreau is a similar exercise in a low-budget, black and white film. But by 1964 Demy was able to realize his dream of a color musical in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, and any stylistic ties to the New Wave movement began to unfasten.[74] The founding and more recognizably iconic directors of the *Cahiers* group scattered into even more individuated and unique trajectories as the French New Wave movement came to a close. Demy's one-time enthusiastic supporter Godard was increasingly turning to film's radical and political potential and became publicly critical of Demy's excess, spectacle, and seemingly mundane subjects.[75]

Scholars like Rodney Hill and Vanessa Schwartz have suggested the need to reestablish Demy within the history of the French New Wave, arguing that not only will this further understanding of the director, but of the movement itself.[76] Hill has even gone

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[74] "His first two features…could have become part of the canon of New Wave films had he not gone on to make the films he did afterwards which have relegated him to minor status." Schwartz, "Who Killed Brigitte Bardot?", 151.

[75] Quandt, "*Jacques Demy, A to Z.*"

[76] See Hill, "Demy-Monde" and Schwartz, "Who Killed Brigitte Bardot?"

so far as to describe Demy as the seemingly paradoxical intersection of the New Wave and the Tradition of Quality.[77] But other scholars insist on the incontrovertible difference between Demy and his contemporary peers. Waldron situates the filmmaker's work as merely *coinciding* with the French New Wave, a matter of happenstance and not causation.[78] Scholars like Duggan and James Quandt have argued that Demy's enduring queer sensibility separates his work from the largely heterosexual and male New Wave as a movement or style. His affinity for classical gay iconography like his ubiquitous sailors and gay icons like Jean Marais, Jean Cocteau and casting of Gene Kelly, George Chakris, Grover Dale, along with his own private sexuality and circumstances (Demy died in 1990 from complications from HIV/AIDS) have situated Demy as a queer filmmaker whose films have been read through queer interpretation.

It is worth highlighting Demy's complicated relationship to the French New Wave because this project will forward an alternative designation of his work as being identified more suitably under Rosalind Galt's conception of the "pretty" film, as well as my own articulation of his status as a Rococo filmmaker.

Demy, Rococo, and the "Pretty"

In her book *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*, Galt examines aesthetic hierarchies inherited by film theory, particularly the long held Western notion of the image as secondary and thus less suitable as a source of politics. Distrust of visual pleasure and fear of the spectacle have long cast suspicion on what Galt has termed the

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[77] See Hill, "The New Wave Meets the Tradition of Quality."

[78] Waldron, *Jacques Demy*, 23.

"pretty" film. The "pretty" image is "colorful, carefully composed, balanced richly textured, or ornamental" and "pretty qualities include deep colors, arabesque camera movement, detailed mise-en-scène, and an emphasis on cinematographic surface. The pretty is self-evidently designed…"[79] Cinema is built upon and heavily invested in the pleasurable image yet actively denies the potential of the "pretty" to access or portray meaningful politics. The"pretty" film is "exactly this quality of discomfort with a style of heightened aesthetics that is too decorative, too sensorially pleasurable to be high art, and yet too composed and 'arty' to be efficient entertainment."[80] In between upheld standards of masculine realism and outright camp, "pretty" aesthetics have traditionally been received very critically. Hostility to the "pretty" film is, as Galt argues, underlaid by longstanding strains of sexism and racism that associate the decorative image with the feminine and the Asiatic/Oriental.[81] Positioning the "pretty" as a space of exclusion, to deny or ostracize certain types of bodies, politics, and experiences as well as categorically displacing films that do employ the ornate, Galt's intervention attempts to reintegrate this denounced mode into the history and theory of film aesthetics.

Galt writes extensively about filmmakers such as Derek Jarman, Ulrike Ottinger, Baz Luhrmann, Claire Denis, and Santosh Sivan, among many others, and although her qualifications for a "pretty" aesthetic style can clearly include the work of Jacques Demy, she never mentions him. His style certainly falls under her description of "an emphasis on visual style, a decorative and composed mise-en-scène, an engagement with the foreign

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[79] Galt, *Pretty*, 11.

[80] Ibid, 12.

[81] Ibid, 6.

and the perverse, and a mode of relating aesthetics to politics that does not fit with prevailing critical or institutional norms."[82] And like many of these other directors, Demy does not fit comfortably in his designated category.[83] Galt does note François Truffaut's notorious "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" that skewers the Tradition of Quality cinema, as an example of the anti-pretty hostility common to film criticism. If Demy inherited and integrated tendencies from this body of films historically sidelined by the French New Wave, like Hill argues, his mode of film contradicts a basic tenant of the New Wave movement.

As Duggan and others have forwarded, Demy's queer aesthetic and politics expressed through his decorative image are fundamentally incompatible with these historical classifications. As a queer and "pretty" filmmaker, Demy falls into a sub-category of the "pretty." In a brief history of queer cinematic aesthetics, Galt notes that that dominating trend is toward drag, camp, and performance that emphasizes an ugly or aggressively exaggerated quality, the decidedly not "pretty." The queer "pretty" is a much smaller and complex body of films in which Galt includes Todd Haynes, François Ozon, and Tsai Ming-liang in addition to the queer color aesthetics of Derick Jarman.[84]

Not only doe Demy's work fit into the "pretty" film aesthetic, but the cinematic Rococo more broadly conceived falls under this term and theory. In Chapter Seven of her book, "Perverse Prettiness: Sexuality, Gender, and Aesthetic Exclusion," Galt addresses the relationship between feminist and queer theory with the "pretty" image. Caught in a

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[82] Ibid, 280.

[83] Ibid, 299.

[84] Ibid, 263, 266, 75.

double bind, upholding the "iconophilic" mentality and suspicion, feminist and queer theory has not adequately grappled with the "pretty." Galt offers a history of the gendered associations of the image that continue to influence film reception, concentrating specifically on the legacies of Neoclassicism as an emergence in reaction against the preceding Rococo style. She explores "how the foundation of modern aesthetics in the mid-eighteenth century builds a hierarchical valuation of simplicity and European masculinity to the detriment of the prettily composed and decorated image" and how this "disprized image, in turn, is rhetorically and materially linked with the feminine, the effeminate, the exotic foreigner, and the colonial subject."[85] The disavowal of the decorative image has haunted Rococo aesthetics since the turn of the eighteenth century and continues to affect the reception of films that use the style. Galt's model offers continued patterns of and explanation for the hostility aimed at the Rococo style, *shōjo* culture, Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* and Demy's *Lady Oscar*.[86]

What the explication of cinematic Rococo aesthetics can offer Galt's theory of the maligned "pretty" is a specificity of scope and history. *Lady Oscar* provides a "pretty" queer film, set in and engaged with the historical contexts surrounding the cultural transition to Neoclassicism, emphasizing feminine networks, experiences, and transgressions based on an originally Japanese text. In her conclusion, Galt suggests a further avenue of "pretty" study is the use of sound. While this project will not delve into

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[85] Ibid, 237.

[86] The premiere of *Marie Antoinette* at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival was notoriously negative, booed by the French audience. While the film has enjoyed a revival in academic studies, general reception was similarly negative and continues to stick to the film's reputation.

the function and affect of Demy's long-term collaborator Michel Legrand's sumptuous scores, Demy's musical mode does offer a promising line of inquiry.

Gendered Performance

Judith Butler's theories about the performance of gender, presented in her seminal 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* resonate strongly with the titular role of Oscar, and, as Waldron notes, with most of Demy's female characters:

> [F]or Demy, theatricality and authenticity are integral parts of everyday experience. Such a worldview also frames his depictions of femininity…In this they present early examples of Judith Butler's conceptualisation of gender as performative, repeated through strategies of imitation and citation rather than 'naturally' assumed at birth…If women are excessive in the *Demy-monde*, it is not only because their gender is theatricalised, but also because their desires, aspirations and behavior exceed the patriarchal regulations in force, which are thus revealed to be antiquated and ineffectual.[87]

Demy's iteration of Marie Antoinette, in contrast to Oscar's maintained masculinity, provides an extreme example of femininity at Versailles, exaggerating and performing her own feminine qualities and mannerisms that arise out of her investment in her societal role as Queen and progenitor of an heir.

Oscar's ability to perform masculinity, without being biologically male or particularly self-identifying as male, also aligns with Judith Halberstam's interrogations

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[87] Waldron, *Jacques Demy*, 129-130.

of gender in *Female Masculinity* (1988). A more useful model of gender performance and theatricality when writing about *Lady Oscar* would be the long history and culture surrounding the Takarazuka Revue, a popular all-women theatre troupe in Japan. Jennifer Robertson opens her anthropological survey of the troupe, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, by relating her own "initiation into the rococo world of the Takarazuka Revue."[88] The biggest allure, for the young and female Japanese audience, has historically been the male performers of the troupe, figures trained in the art of performative masculinity and who inspired the character design of Oscar. Robertson uses the Takarazuka as a section of culture that reveals the layers and complications of gender designation and performance constantly at work in Japanese society.[89] My study will primarily draw on the work of Erica Stevens Abbitt from her article "Androgyny and Otherness: Exploring the West Through the Japanese Performative Body" which foregrounds the intersection of androgyny and the cultural Other in the Takarazuka Revue's production adapted from *The Rose of Versailles*.

Shōjo Culture

The Takarazuka is a small section of a much broader *shōjo* mode: an industry, genre, and mode that informs and shapes the cultural expressions and experiences of the young Japanese girls. Literature on *shōjo* has been a growing area of girl studies and media studies, specifically manga/anime studies, exploring both the endemic industry along with the universal appeal and success abroad. The history and breadth of *shōjo* is

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[88] Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 1.

[89] Ibid, 20.

extensive and writing on Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles* is widespread as it is regarded as a foundational *shōjo* text of the 1970s. Shamoon writes extensively about the development and influence of *The Rose of Versailles*, in her book *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*. Scholars like Aso Noriko have written about the legacy of *The Rose of Versailles* and the beloved character of Oscar.[90] Now a trope of *shōjo* narratives, the princely girl/woman is a staple of ambiguity and fantasy. McKnight, as mentioned above, discusses the comic in the context of Ikeda's own gender and class politics. Honda Masuko in "The Genealogy of *hirahira*: Liminality and the Girl" uses *The Rose of Versailles* character designs in a study of girly objects. Ruffles and ribbons are considered for their formal presence and movement, indicating an alogical and ephemeral space of girlhood in a project similar to Galt's politics of the "pretty" object.

The role of objects in *shōjo* are tied to consumer trends from the 1970s, most notably the emergence of a "cute" culture or a *kawaii* culture, a perceived symptom of rampant consumerism and Western influence. As Sharon Kinsella outlines in "Cuties in Japan," the fashion was to embrace anything cute, to buy aesthetically-pleasing products invested with notions of childhood purity, femininity, and Western luxury or exoticism. The mode encompasses everything from fashion, mundane daily products, and accessories to behavior, speech patterns, and handwriting. For example, cute handwriting "was arrived at partly through the romanization of Japanese text. The horizontal left to right format of cute handwriting and the liberal use of exclamation marks, as well as English words such as 'love' and 'friend', suggest that these young people were rebelling

[90] Aso, "Revolutionary Girls," 16.

against traditional Japanese culture and identifying with European culture which they obviously imagined to be more fun."[91] The youthful movement was tied to a broader rejection of Japanese society, an extension of childhood in face of the heavy and often unwanted responsibilities of adulthood tied to romanticization of European history and culture.

The commodity and consumerism underlying *shōjo* literature and conventions is explored the work of scholars like Jennifer Prough and John Treat.[92] Prough's in depth study of the contemporary *shōjo* comic industry demonstrates that the emotional logic of *shōjo* narratives is reprised within the economic structure of the market and production of goods. The human relations between producer/consumer, creator/fan, editor/writer, etc blur within the *shōjo* mode, sustaining a perpetuating cycle of commodified community. And as John Treat addresses, the *shōjo* mode can apply to and describe other portions of the Japanese population beyond just the adolescent girl: "[o]ne might well argue that *shōjo* constitute their own gender neither male nor female but rather something importantly detached from the productive economy of heterosexual reproduction…A distinct gender, a distinct age cohort and a distinct status as consumer: the Japanese *shōjo* is a sign, one uniquely positioned as a master trope for all social forms of consumption."[93] With the detachment of the concept of *shōjo* from gender and from the

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[91] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 224.

[92] See Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga* and Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*, or the Cultural Logic of Japanese Consumerism."

[93] Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*," 281.

body, Treat observes the wider application of the mode encompassing all ages and genders.

Frenchy Lunning in "Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power" positions the *shōjo* through Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. While I do not agree with the imposition of this model of psychoanalysis onto the *shōjo* mode, her discussion of the universal appeal of *shōjo* is useful. The "capacity as a truly transnational, transgendered cultural symbol and aesthetic commodity" situates the *shōjo* as a mode appealing to a global audience, transcendent in a similar fashion as Rococo aesthetics.[94] Lunning also addresses the relationship between the *shōjo* genre and another subset of *shōjo* culture: Lolita fashion.

As an alternative element of Rococo aesthetics in Japanese media, Lolita subculture, exemplified in *Kamikaze Girls*, has been written of as an excessively feminine fashion that resists patriarchal notions through hyper-visibility and hyper-femininity. As scholars like McKnight, Kawamura Yuniya, and Masafumi Monden have noted Lolita subculture has also been identified as a site of extreme expressions of individuality and identity through fashion and clothing. Masafumi Monden, in a chapter of her book *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan,* analyzes the utilization of Lolita fashion in *Kamikaze Girls*, arguing that these sartorial choices do not necessarily reflect a system of oppression as older, sociological studies of feminine fashion have proposed. Monden specifically cites her opposition to the economic theories of Thorstein Veblen, who asserts that exaggerated and restrained

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[94] Lunning, "Under the Ruffles," 17.

female fashion, such as the emphasized delicacy and fragility during the Victorian period, acts as a display of wealth and class. The woman is conceived as a decorative object, not a productive or useful body, but as an economic weight that needs to be fed and clothed, and can prove the earning power of a husband. Pushing against this mode of thinking about Japanese-adopted Victorian fashion, Monden emphasizes the autonomy of the Lolita protagonist despite and even because of her choice in clothing, describing it as a manifestation of "psychological androgyny," where she realizes traditionally masculine independence and eventually violence even when dressed in delicate clothing.

The similar visual strategies, contexts, and experiences of youthful femininity tie together *shōjo* and Rococo aesthetics. The desire for greater freedom, the extension of youth, the power of feminine consumerism, and elaborate displays of self-expression and identity are explored in these intersecting modes, a convergence most blatant in the transition and translation from Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles* to Demy's *Lady Oscar*. I hope this historical and aesthetic approach, drawing on various writings on the nature of the decorative image, will offer a suitable explanation for Demy's little known but remarkable film.

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